

THE NOVELS OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, PHILOSOPHER.

An analysis and interpretation.

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par

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INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Sartre first appeared on the French literary scene just prior to the war years with the publication of his first novel, La Nausée, in 1938, and a collection of short stories, under the title Le Mur,⁽¹⁾ in 1939. The publication of his major philosophical statement, L'Être et le Néant, in 1943 provoked widespread interest and much lively discussion which today, a quarter of a century later, is by no means at an end. The name of Jean-Paul Sartre will undoubtedly be remembered in connection with his interpretation of existential philosophy. As a literary man, however, his position is less clear.

In the realm of the theatre Sartre was accorded a wide acclaim in the post-war period as he confronted his audience with dramatic plays expressing the ideas of his philosophy and incorporating aspects of the contemporary scene. If Sartre's literary reputation is to survive the test of time and fickle literary tastes, some think it will be as a dramatist, not as a novelist. One reason for this view is that his interest in the dramatic medium has been a more constant one and the theatre has proved a very productive outlet for his talents, whereas his novelistic achievement has been sporadic, interrupted by the appeals of dramatic and philosophical writing.

It was not until seven years after the publication of La Nausée that the first two volumes of Les Chemins de la Liberté appeared. Four years later a further volume was published and two chapters of the projected final volume, (2) but the intended four-novel cycle remains unfinished for since 1949 Sartre has abandoned the fictional genre entirely and at this stage it appears that he will not return to it. But, as Maurice Cranston points out, (3) one should not neglect Sartre's fiction although his interest has since extended more to other fields.

A study such as this must necessarily find itself restricted in scope. It would be impossible to attempt anything like a complete discussion of the many facets of Sartre's career for his writings have been prolific and include philosophical and political essays, literary criticism, theatre, and fiction - vastly differing fields but all basically united by the powerful intellect and verbal talent of their author who has provided such a mass of complications and paradoxes for critics to ponder. I have therefore chosen to discuss only the four novels although this forms a relatively small proportion of Sartre's interests as a writer and thinker. It is not my intention to discuss Sartre's ideas as they are stated in his theoretical writings, nor to contest the validity of

his philosophical views. My concern is to deal with the imaginative expression of those ideas in his novels.

I have chosen to study the novels, rather than the plays, for two major reasons. Firstly, although Sartre's plays also incorporate aspects of his philosophy in specific situations, the novels, developed more slowly and at greater length, perhaps provide more comprehensive material for a study of his thought as it is embodied in fictional form. La Nausée gives us an example of the major tenets of his phenomenological philosophy and in Les Chemins de la Liberté we find evidence of his deep interest in the contemporary world and a revelation of his conviction of the importance of individual freedom.

The second reason is a matter of perspective. There is always a risk in attempting a critical appraisal of the work of a writer in his own lifetime since one's views on his achievement as a whole may so easily be rendered obsolete by the fresh evidence of subsequent works. Obviously one cannot pronounce final judgement on a writer whose development is continuing. A certain retrospective detachment is necessary. From this point of view, the fact that Sartre has abandoned his career as a novelist and has shown no inclination to return to this genre over

the last nineteen years or so, is more of an advantage than a disadvantage in that it allows the critic to consider the four novels as the sum total of his activity in this genre. Although this constitutes but one aspect of his work, and is incomplete at that, I believe that Sartre profited from this "tentative manquée" as it were, and that his readers and critics may well do likewise.

The "roman existentiel" has come to be acknowledged almost as a distinct genre. Simone de Beauvoir, in her article "Littérature et Métaphysique", ⁽⁴⁾ describes how, by seeking to capture metaphysical reality in the dramatic moment of experience, existentialism often finds its medium of expression in fiction. As a leading figure of the existentialist school, Sartre's contribution to the existential novel is significant and La Nausée may be considered as the prototype of this kind of novel, revealing as it does the major issues of Sartre's existential philosophy.

But although this work appeared in 1938, curiously enough the term "existentialist" did not come into vogue until about 1943 when it started to be used as a convenient appellation for Sartre and his followers. The sub-title of L'Être et le Néant, ⁽⁵⁾ clearly indicates that Sartre thought of himself primarily as a phenomenologist but he

resigned himself to accepting the label "existentialist" conferred upon him by others and soon came to use the word himself.

Simone de Beauvoir entitled her book on existential ethics The Ethics of Ambiguity. (6) Paradox and ambiguity are central to existentialist thinking and the philosophers of this school recognize this even in accepting the adjective "existentialiste" which has largely replaced Kierkegaard's original usage "existentielle". A certain rapport is maintained of course but Kierkegaard held that it was only in subjectivity that man could grasp existence and therefore he was opposed to systematized philosophy and did not develop his own doctrine as such. Sartre, like Heidegger, can not be called truly "existential" in this sense, since he did develop a formal doctrine in L'Etre et le Néant. However, a literary approach can provide the sort of subjective immediacy which is truly "existentielle" and Sartre's fiction must therefore be considered as an independent expression of his ideas, not as a mere appendage to the philosophy formulated in his theoretical works. Sartre himself has emphasized this point in an interview with Madeleine Chapsal, (7) encouraging his readers to seek in his fiction views on ethics and human relationships which are not necessarily included in his philosophical writings.

The publication of the autobiographical Les Mots in 1964 produced Sartre's own opinions of his past achievement in his literary activities and his forthright testimony as to the changes in his attitude towards his writing as his career developed proved somewhat disconcerting.

"J'ai changé..." he said (M p.209), and the more hostile of his critics were quick to seize upon this passage in particular as an admission of failure and dissatisfaction with his former literary beliefs. However, in a subsequent article in Le Monde, Sartre replies to his critics, declaring that he does not reject any of his writings but does not consider them to be of equal value. Nor does his later development in his attitude towards literature invalidate former "illusions" which none the less were sincerely held beliefs at the time. "Je ne me suis pas désespéré et ne renie pas mon œuvre antérieure," he states. (8)

Sartre has aroused widespread interest, gathered a strong following of disciples, and provoked much critical antagonism. As a writer and thinker he is a complex phenomenon and, as might be expected, his attitudes are not definitive but flexible, for lack of fixity is a central tenet of his thought. But the resulting ambiguities and paradoxes have provided many a headache for critics seeking consistency. So much contradictory criticism has been

written about Sartre's novels that today, nearly twenty years after the publication of his last novel, the subject is still by no means exhausted nor the controversies resolved. Sartre's novels will no doubt continue to be assessed and re-assessed for some time to come.

It was precisely this body of conflicting interpretations which motivated me to attempt my own closer examination of the novels. Therefore the opinions expressed in this study are in part subjective, but also, I hope, sufficiently objective in so far as, in order to have some basis of justification for my judgement, I have not only scrutinised the novels themselves, but have also tried to read a range of differing critical interpretations of both the literature and philosophy of Sartre. A selection of the books which I found most helpful and stimulating in this respect is included in the bibliography.

In attempting a critical appraisal of the novels my method has been straightforward. I begin with a general introductory chapter in which I try to place Sartre in the perspective of his time - a necessary preliminary, I feel, since he is a writer deeply concerned with his contemporary period and whose work reflects this. Having done this, I shall proceed to examine each of the novels in turn, chronologically, to extract from them the fictional

illustrations of the themes of his philosophy.

It will be noticed that the first two novels are dealt with at greater length. The reason for this is that I believe they are the more successful of his novels from a literary point of view. Also both are complete in themselves, in spite of the fact that L'Age de Raison is the first of a series. The second of this series, Le Sursis, requires a knowledge of the characters of the first unless it is to seem overwhelmingly bewildering, especially as the stylistic technique which Sartre adopts is itself inclined to confuse the reader. At first the "simultaneous" technique is promising. It is dynamic and appropriate to the theme and atmosphere which Sartre wishes to convey but towards the end it does become rather tiresome. Perhaps Sartre found it so too, for in the third volume Sartre returns to his accustomed style. Structurally, however, the novel is less satisfying than his previous work. This again may indicate that he is beginning to weary of the tetralogy which he has begun and left unfinished.

In a further chapter I shall consider Les Chemins de la Liberté as a series, looking briefly at the two chapters of what was to have been the final volume of the

tetralogy, together with the outline for the rest of that book. I shall discuss the problems raised by its central theme of freedom and whether or not the apparent impasse which it reaches and Sartre's abandonment of the sequence is indeed indicative of a "literature of despair" as has sometimes been claimed.

In the final chapter I shall turn again from the particular to the general to consider the validity of a "littérature philosophique" since this is the objection perhaps most frequently raised by critics in connection with Sartre's novels.

CHAPTER 1.

THE AUTHOR AND HIS AGE

Every age inevitably projects its own image of man and his world into its art and letters and many have been the accusations against a certain section of the novels of this century of comprising a literature of despair and pessimism. If such an apparently pessimistic attitude by so many intelligent writers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, has become a prevalent feature of a proportion of French literature of the twentieth century, this must surely be attributable in part to the difficulties and insecurities of the times. Sartre's "point de départ" in his novels, as elsewhere, is undeniably just such an attitude of disillusionment and an almost obsessive sense, shared by many others since the disenchanted period during and following the first World War, of the apparent futility of life itself.

Some critics have attempted to discredit existentialism by claiming that it was merely a part of the after-math of the Second World War and France's guilty conscience since the Spanish Civil War. This slighting attitude is an

injustice to existential philosophy. It is only to be expected that post-war Europe should have evolved an anguished philosophy incorporating its recent experience when other faiths could not account for the tragedies and horrors of war and the insecurity of society and the individual. But, in retrospect, it is evident that existentialism was not the result of World War 11 alone, although this is certainly a factor in the more general 20th century 'malaise' to which Sartre's existentialism gives expression. However, much of existential philosophy is derived from the nineteenth century philosophers, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and a large proportion of what is most original in Sartre's thinking was already present in his first novel, La Nausée, which was published in 1938. Certainly French existentialism, with its ethics of desperate heroism and anguished responsibility, found a ready public during the war years and the time of the Occupation when life was insecure and precarious. The normal social organisation was in a state of upheaval and a new code of values had to emerge.

In the years after the end of the war, Sartre's ideas, as he incarnated them in the dramatic characters of his plays and novels, were to find a predominantly youthful audience and provide a fulfilment of sorts to the needs of a young generation whose minds had been shocked by the

horrors of war and bewildered by the apparent absurdity and futility of life.

On this point too existentialism has suffered derogatory treatment. For many people during these years, particularly the American public it seems, existentialism became associated with a bohemian cult of would-be intellectuals who seemed to spend their lives frequenting Paris cafés. It would be ridiculous to suggest that there was no basis for this impression, that French existential philosophy does not have an element of the sensational and the morbid. Undoubtably the new philosophy had a certain attraction for this type, but the attraction was superficial for beyond the apparently nihilistic pessimism of his existential thought, Sartre offers the uncompromising, moralistic teaching of the need for maturity and responsibility on the part of the individual in order to bring about a change for the better in society. He demands a resolute and sincere courage to reach for the hope which lies beyond despair.

But just how is it that man's situation in this century has become so desperate that some of France's most talented writers, including Malraux, Bernanos and Céline, have felt obliged to depict in their fictional work a

brutalized image of man in an absurd, illogical universe. It seems that from the early years of the century multiple forces have been at work which tend to disintegration of human dignity. Political and social events, and the sometimes frightening progress of science, have combined to destroy or considerably undermine traditional humanist or religious concepts.

On the spiritual level western civilization has been undergoing a process of increasing secularization. Man has become inevitably more concerned with the materialistic here-and-now of this life than with the goal of a transcendental reality beyond this world.

On the historical level, the outbreak of war in 1914 abruptly shattered any illusion of a secure, progressive humanity. The bourgeois was rudely stripped of the shelter of his stable social environment and could take no comfort in his former humanist philosophy.

Financial depression, unemployment, the rise of Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, and the impending threat of another war were to put an end to the nascent optimism of the decade following the end of World War 1. The writers emerging in the thirties, Malraux, Bernanos, St. Exupéry, inevitably became more concerned with the contemporary scene. With the Spanish Civil War and the defeat and occupation of France in World War II, literature became

closely linked to the historical situation. War and revolution became one of the creative stimuli in thought and literature, producing a spate of novels with this as their theme. If existential literature depicts absurdity it is because contemporary events have accentuated this with the brutal horrors of war. Unlike Monterlant for instance, not all contemporary writers felt able to ignore this state of affairs.

Paralleling these historical events was the social and political phenomenon of the growing influence of leftist ideologies which further undermined what was left of "bourgeois" values by placing the emphasis on the proletariat as the rising force in society and stating the capitalist centred structure of society. The bourgeoisie was obliged to see its image of the social order crumble and existential philosophy may be seen as the product of a bourgeois society in a state of dissolution in so far as the individual, no longer able to rely on his social identity, has had to come to terms with himself.

Modern man is a witness to violence, evil, insecurity, and the apparent collapse of human values, and these are the anxious problems for which western civilization must seek answers. Existentialism embodies the self-questioning of an age where man is desperately trying to re-orient himself.

Existential philosophy encourages individuals to struggle with the possibilities for an authentic and genuine life in opposition to the threat of the demand for conformity by the tendency toward a standardized, depersonalized society. The themes of existential literature - the alienation of the individual and his estrangement from his fellow beings, the sense of the fundamental futility and precariousness of human existence, the threat of nothingness and death, are problems derived from the historical situation. But the truths so bitterly taught by the events of the war years and post-war period are not necessarily only local or exceptional truths and the existential writers and thinkers have afforded philosophical insights of enduring and universal value. Existentialism certainly originated from the historical mood of Europe since it was Europe which experienced crisis and European thinkers who gave expression to this philosophy, but the significance of existentialism is far-reaching. It is not the philosophy only of twentieth century Europe but has a general application for our troubled age.

If we turn to examine the literature of this century we find that the general "malaise" of the age is reflected there. Testifying to the general breakdown of an established moral and intellectual order, novels of

disquiet reflect an "age of anxiety". Of course, by no means all novels come within this category. One has only to recall the pantheistic novels of the earlier Giono, the charm and simplicity of Bosco's characters and settings, and the intensely religious writing of a Catholic author like Mauriac, to realise that the novels of anxiety are but one aspect of the broader literary scene.

Nevertheless, the disintegration of a classical, humanistic concept of man is one emergent feature of the twentieth century novel. The display of man's inhumanity to man in World War 1 remained deeply engraved in the minds of some post-war writers. With the advent of Freud and the science of psycho-analysis the former conception of personality crumbled still further as man was stripped of his surface veneer to expose the base primitive instincts which were his motivating forces. The cult of the morbid, violent, and abnormal in literature was advanced by the influence of Franz Kafka and his portrayal of the terror and bewilderment of the character in an illogical, absurd, nightmarish world. For a time the violent and aggressive American novels, particularly those of Hemingway and Faulkner, enjoyed popular vogue in France and influenced some French writers in the 1930's.

From the 1930's onward a proportion of French novels have given an unfavourable picture of human nature, continuing to diminish the human image with their pre-occupation in describing man's humiliation in the grip of his baseness. Céline's Voyage au bout de la Nuit (1) is one such novel. There seems to be little of human dignity or heroism in the brutal image which the novels present and which coincides with a similar brutalization and demoralization of humanity by the crises of two world wars and an uneasy "peace". That man had been harshly thrust into a situation of horror where society was no longer stable nor comforting, and neither was its literature, is witnessed by the fundamental pessimism which pervades the work of a writer such as Anouilh.

Previous moral values had lost their significance and were no longer applicable in such a metamorphosed society. Such are the dilemmas of the human condition which the writings of the existentialists reflect. Sartre reacts with "nausea" to the superfluity and arbitrariness of the physical world and man's relation to it. He attacks most of his potential readers in his scathing portrayals of the "salaud" type of character, and in his onslaught against the no longer relevant standards of a bourgeois society and traditional humanist values. Deprived

of all social veneer the character is reduced to a primitive viscosity and "l'homme absurde" of existential literature is revealed as no more than an emptiness or void. This is obviously a violently anti-literary attitude and one wonders if such an attitude can lead to anywhere but an impasse.

The form of the novel has undergone considerable change too this century. True, the novel is one literary genre which has never known the restraint of a system of theory and rules. However, certain traditional concepts have developed with regard to the basic techniques of the novelist's art in handling plot, character, situation and so on. But today it appears that the plot of a novel now matters less than formerly. Not infrequently the development of events is already evident from the outset, particularly if the author chooses to work back from the present to a reminiscence of past events, as Sartre does in Le Sursis for instance. Far more important than plot is the matter of how the characters react under the impact of changing events and character reaction has become a primary concern of novelists. Part of the reason for this may be that without a stable social reality to which characters may be directly related, the emphasis focuses to a greater extent on the individual consciousness. This, coupled with

the psycho-analytic preoccupations of the age, has caused the novel to assume a more introspective form. One of the practical results of this is that a novel, such as La Nausée, may limit its scope to an examination in depth of a single consciousness in its continuous state of flux. The same applies to Camus' L'Etranger, (2) where the attention is focused entirely on Meursault, the absurd hero par excellence.

The metaphysical nature of the novel has always been tacitly implied in as much as the author's interpretation of reality is visible in his creation of a fictional world and characters and his novels will reflect his moral conceptions of life. This century, however, the novel's metaphysical tendencies have ceased to be sublimated and have become explicit. Writers have become acutely self-conscious and recent generations of novelists particularly have been concerned to awaken their reader from their social and moral complacency to recognise their bad conscience and neglected responsibility. Novels ruthlessly analyse individuals in order to elicit a new scrutiny and re-assessment of the social conscience.

With literature increasingly reflecting contemporary problems and uncertainties many writers began to show their

philosophical or political affiliations directly in their fictional work. Since Malraux, it has come to be expected of novelists, and in particular those of the existential school, that their work should investigate the difficulties of authentic being, of assuming one's freedom and responsibility, of discovering valid standards in a life constantly threatened by "Nothingness". Some critics have expressed the opinion, and not without a measure of justification, that the novel begins its decline as a literary genre when it becomes concerned with social and metaphysical considerations almost to the point of excluding certain traditional aesthetic concepts. It may thus degenerate into what Camus terms "une littérature de la propagande".

Victor Brombert, (3) sees the modern French novel as having been over-run by intellectuals and the experiences recounted in fictional form are not depicted by the actions and emotions of the characters but via the mental reactions of the protagonists. The existential novel especially seems to have become the natural abode of the "intellectual hero" who is given to constantly analysing himself, his surroundings, and his anguished situation in an absurd world. Brombert sees the reason for this preponderance of intellectual characters partly in the fact that scholars, teachers and even professional philosophers, have turned to writing novels.

But the primary factor is the fundamental appeal which a "littérature d'idées" has for the French mind. In French literature generally ideological and philosophical themes are readily translated into dramatic forces and Brombert notes that Gustave Lanson in the Avant-Propos to L'Histoire de la Littérature Française states that:

"La littérature est, dans le plus noble sens du mot, une vulgarisation de la philosophie." (4)

The novel as the medium not of story-tellers, but of moralists, aims to increase the readers awareness and understanding of a concept of reality and to encourage him, despite the apparent bleakness of his situation, to formulate the values necessary to give a meaning to his existence. Sartre states the passionate intensity of metaphysical literature in "Qu'est ce que la littérature?" thus:

"La métaphysique n'est pas une discussion stérile sur des notions abstraites qui échappent à l'expérience, c'est un effort vivant pour embrasser du dedans la condition humaine dans sa totalité." (5)

The novel is not a mere vehicle for philosophical reflections but has reached the stage where the philosophy itself has become a dramatic force in the novel. Problems are not presented as a spectacle but as an experience in which the reader is directly involved.

It is a significant literary phenomenon that such novels have become intellectualized to the extent of becoming a transposition into fictional themes of the anguished self-questioning of man in this era. Sartre's novels and plays are deliberately laden with the intellectual anguish which he considers the truest expression of the age. He believes that a writer should wrestle with the problems which beset man in his own time and environment, and this is what he attempts, particularly in his later fiction. His writing must have validity primarily for his contemporaries since it appears that the writer of today has become the keeper of the social conscience, responsible not only to himself and to his art, but also to his public. It is Sartre's contention that literature should naturally be "committed"; that is, it should try to evoke a choice for commitment on the part of the reader by revealing the reality of the human condition in the hope of finding an answer to contemporary social problems.

On the other hand, Sartre is by no means suggesting that literature should be judged by its purely utilitarian value of provoking moral reform since this would reduce the novel to the level of a propagandist tract. What he does want is that the language of prose literature be used as a

means of real communication, not merely as an everyday functional tool nor as a weapon of propaganda. He does not extend this role to the more "aesthetic" forms of music, painting, or poetry where words are rightly symbols and objects in themselves rather than communicatives.

But Sartre's central concept of literary commitment, which is intellectual in approach, as one might expect, is closely bound to his philosophic concepts regarding freedom. For him literature is a mode of action. It is the act of a writer's freedom appealing to the freedom of other individuals in inviting them to "prendre conscience", to recognise and accept their human situation. In Qu'est ce que la littérature? he explains that literature is the act by which the writer, exercising his freedom, appeals to other individuals to respond, and subsequently commends the cause of freedom for all mankind. In Existentialisme est un humanisme, ⁽⁶⁾ he further clarifies the link between freedom and commitment. Individual freedom depends on the exercise of choice and when a man chooses he is creating a value not only for himself but for all others since "tout est responsable de tout devant tous". He is thus committed to will the freedom of the collective body at the same time as he wills his individual freedom. This is the morality of freedom and responsibility which Sartre advocates and of which the "engagement" of the author is one aspect.

Commitment in literature is an extension of the writer's responsibility to arouse in his readers a commitment on their own behalf to a morality which will invest existence with meaning. As Sartre originally intended it, the phrase "committed literature" referred to literature committed to any genuinely moral view of life whatever. But since 1949 Sartre has become increasingly concerned with political and social issues and "littérature engagée" has assumed connotations of "literature committed to socialism" when used by some critics. True, much of his later work especially lends sufficient support for such an interpretation but it was never Sartre's intention to advocate that a committed writer should align himself with a particular party and use literature as a weapon in a revolutionary cause or in the class war. He has clearly stated:

"La littérature engagée n'est pas une littérature de militant". (7)

Obviously there must be pitfalls inherent in the concept of literary commitment which forms both a strength and a weakness in Sartre's work. Ambiguities and contradictions arise which are bound to lead to a degree of literary disillusionment. In an interview with Madeleine Chapsal in 1960, Sartre confesses having lost some of his earlier literary illusions.

"My first books", he says, "...weren't directly involved with social problems. Then came the occupation. We began to think that action was necessary. After the war we thought that books, articles etc. could serve usefully. They didn't do anything at all. Later.....I thought books pondered over and written out without any concern with immediate pertinence, might help in the long run. Well even that doesn't serve any useful purpose. That's not how you go about having influence on people; you find that what you've thought and felt just gets deformed." (8)

In spite of this, however, he still believes that the motivation of the writer is: "to bear witness to their times to their lives; they want to be, above all else, their own witnesses." (9)

The difficulty of the theory and practice of a committed philosophic literature is, as Miss Murdoch notes in her book Sartre, Romantic Rationalist, (10) that the appeal of Sartre's novels, being problematic and analytical, does depend largely on our being initially moved by the intellectual conflicts with which they deal.

CHAPTER IILA NAUSEE

"C'est un garçon sans importance collective,
c'est tout juste un individu."

This quotation from Céline with which Sartre prefaces La Nausée provides a significant key to the understanding of its "hero", Antoine Roquentin, the epitome of the lonely man, isolated in solitude from the rest of his fellow men.

We are told that this book is his diary, discovered among his papers after his death. Such a method of intimate presentation permits the author to install himself in the consciousness of the book's single character, a very dull man living a very dull life until the day he experiences the metaphysical vertigo which inspires him to "tenir un journal pour y voir clair."

We are also told that he has travelled extensively as an archaeologist-historian, although it is a little difficult to reconcile this past life of action with the inactivity and boredom of his life over the last three years in Bouville where he has settled in order to have access to certain documents in the municipal library to

assist him in his research into the life of M. de Rollebon whose biography he is writing.

He has been separated for four years from his ex-mistress, Anny, who was perhaps the only person who ever meant anything to him. Few other people are mentioned in the book and since Roquentin's acquaintance with them is but superficial the reader's knowledge of them is sketchy. Apart from these few casual acquaintances, Roquentin is alone in Bouville, a stranger among its citizens.

"Moi je vis seul, entièrement seul. Je ne parle à personne, jamais; je ne reçois rien, je ne donne rien. L'Autodidacte ne compte pas. Il y a bien Françoise, la patronne du "Rendez-vous des Cheminots." Mais est-ce que je lui parle?" (N. p.18)

He sleeps with the cafe proprietress but feels no affection or even desire for her. The few acquaintances he has made in Bouville ignite no spark of human companionship in him, no wish for communication.

The loneliness of Roquentin and his isolation are extreme but it does not trouble him unduly - in fact he seems quite proud of it. A somewhat disillusioned and unenthusiastic historian who has long forgotten any reason he might have had for undertaking to write M. de Rollebon's

biography, he passes each day in dreary boredom and inner solitude within the confines of his hotel room, the library, or a cafe. No friendship brightens his drab existence for he feels far removed from the people around him. Their personalities, thoughts, and feelings have little meaning or interest for him. A completely detached observer, he sees others from without and as if from a distance, a sensation similar to looking down from his hotel window at the people in the square below.

Roquentin is completely "déraciné". At thirty years of age he has no job since his private income, though modest, is sufficient for his needs. He has rejected his past way of life, has no family, no friends, no responsibilities. In addition to being independent in personal matters, Roquentin is also independent of the rest of society. He has no sense of himself as a social being. Francis Jeanson points out that as the diary was ostensibly written in 1932, during that period before the imminence of war became fully apparent when any collective conflicts "were dividing French society only in a dull way", (1) it is hardly surprising that Roquentin should be so apathetic towards social matters. He is quite "dégagé" and it is precisely because he has no sense of collectivity, because he is not personally engaged in any social issues, that

Roquentin is able to preserve the role of being an onlooker set apart from the rest of society.

In the most literal sense therefore he may seem to be completely "free" but his independence is a mockery of real freedom as Sartre understands it and affords him no happiness. The original title intended for the book was Melancholia and Roquentin's whole outlook on life is decidedly melancholic. Since solitude is not a natural state he is bored and dissatisfied. The metaphysical experience which overwhelms him is a highly individual one, possible only because he is such an isolated consciousness and therefore the more susceptible to discovering the absurdity of existence in attacks of what John Weightman, ⁽²⁾ terms "contingency-sickness."

In her chapter from Les Sandales d'Empédocle entitled "Sartre ou la duplicité de l'être: Ascèse et Mythomanie", Claude-Edmonde Magny ⁽³⁾ concludes that extreme alienation is necessary if one is to experience the revelation of certain aspects of reality in the way Roquentin does. Therefore Roquentin chooses an attitude of "tricherie", as Magny calls it, - "tricherie" because the initial choice of such an attitude must be "deliberate, 'willed', and therefore suspect", but the word is not intended pejoratively. This "cheating" involves a rejection of the whole set of

defence mechanisms which normally protect one from being invaded by symptoms of nausea and anxiety. But in Sartre's view such symptoms are intimations of metaphysical reality and the social concepts which we acknowledge present a barrier to the understanding of the profound reality which lies behind them so the "cheater's" social framework must be destroyed, leaving him without the defence of his integration in a family, a circle of friends, and a profession.

It is also necessary that he should reject his past. In Malraux's La Voie Royale, ⁽⁴⁾ Claude Vannec had turned his back on fixed modes of living and found in a life of travel and adventure a justification for existence. Roquentin too had travelled in foreign parts, living a similar sort of life, but he rejects the daemon of adventure since it is a form of self-deception or mythomania to consider one's life as a series of adventures when actually it is only a disconnected sequence of gratuitous events which only in retrospect can be invested with the significance of "adventures".

"Je n'ai pas eu d'aventures. Il m'est arrivé des histoires, des événements, des incidents, tout ce qu'on voudra. Mais pas des aventures... Des aventures sont dans les livres." (N. pp.54-55)

As a man with no past therefore, Roquentin clings to the present and the intensity and uniqueness of each moment.

The rejection of social relationships and his past way of life are the physical means of alienation but a mental alienation is also necessary. Magny describes this as a rejection of the concept of a lucid personality, a renunciation of the "I". When this has been accomplished each thought exists of its own accord since, theoretically, there is no longer any agent to create the thought.

"A présent, quand je dis 'je', ça me semble creux. Je n'arrive plus très bien à me sentir, tellement je suis oublié. Tout ce qui reste de réel, en moi, c'est de l'existence qui se sent exister. Je bâille doucement, longuement. Personne. Pour personne, Antoine Roquentin n'existe. Ça m'amuse. Et qu'est-ce que c'est que ça, Antoine Roquentin? C'est de l'abstrait. Un pâle petit souvenir de moi vacille dans ma conscience. Antoine Roquentin... Et soudain le Je pâlit et s'en est fait, il s'éteint.

Lucide, immobile, déserte, la conscience est posée entre les murs; elle se perpétue. Personne ne l'habite plus. Tout à l'heure encore quelqu'un disait moi, disait ma conscience. Qui? (....) La conscience existe comme un arbre, comme un brin d'herbe. Elle somnole, elle s'ennuie. De petites existences fugitives la peuplent comme des oiseaux dans les branches. La peuplent et disparaissent." (N. p.212)

Such depersonalization and the destruction of all social elements are not undertaken simply for their own sake of course, but are justified since they make

revelation possible. Only when divested of the social integration of his life and thought, having freed himself from his dependence on others and entered the solitary confines of his own depths, can Roquentin see things in a way which the "salauds" can not.

Because he feels "different" from the others, Roquentin has a sense of superiority over the people he sees around him and it is precisely because he is so totally alien to this circle that he can analyse, harshly and sarcastically, the pettiness of Bouville's inhabitants. On a Sunday morning walk through the streets of Bouville he watches, detached and aloof, the parade of anonymous beings each conforming to the pattern of behaviour expected of him. This episode is a brilliant evocation of the rigidity of the Bouvillois as they all too readily assume the stereotyped mannerisms of the roles which they are expected to play.

"Sur l'autre trottoir, un monsieur, qui tient sa femme par le bras, vient de lui glisser quelques mots à l'oreille et s'est mis à sourire. Aussitôt, elle dépouille soigneusement de toute expression sa face crémeuse et fait quelques pas en aveugle. Ces signes ne trompent pas: ils vont saluer. En effet, au bout d'un instant, le monsieur jette sa main en l'air. Quand ses doigts sont à proximité de son feutre, ils hésitent une seconde avant de se poser délicatement sur la coiffe. Pendant qu'il soulève doucement son chapeau, en baissant un peu la tête pour aider à

l'extraction, sa femme fait un petit saut en inscrivant sur son visage un sourire jeune. Une ombre les dépasse en s'inclinant: mais leurs deux sourires jumeaux ne s'effacent pas sur-le-champ: ils demeurent quelques instants sur leurs lèvres, par une espèce de rémanence. Quand le monsieur et la dame me croisent, ils ont repris leur impassibilité, mais il leur reste encore un air gai autour de la bouche."

(N. pp.64-5)

Their automatic reflexes and concern with social trivialities show how wrapt they are in playing their roles of existing only for others.

According to Sartre, such Being-for-Others is a cowardly attempt of the consciousness to avoid the anguishing quest for Self-coincidence. Rather than face its own interior emptiness the consciousness looks for a confirmation of its being in other consciousnesses by urging others to conform to certain roles in order that they may seem a stable reflection of itself and therefore affirm for it an illusory solidity. Such wishes to exist, not in oneself, but in the look of others, in social considerations, in the accumulation of material possessions, are all manifestations of "mauvaise foi", vain deceptions which make of man a "passion inutile".

Instead of recognising the nauseating gratuitousness of existence and the anguish it brings the "salaud" prefers to remain in comfortable conformity, accepting

conventional social values as absolutes. Thus the typical bourgeois "salaud" conceals his own situation by enveloping himself in his honour, morality, and social importance. Examining the portraits of the city fathers in the local museum Roquentin indulges in a fierce attack on these "swine" who with their money and respectability have made class assumptions their absolute. They believe they have found their niche in the social scale and occupy it with a clear conscience having blended themselves to the human condition. But equally at fault are those who unquestioningly accept the established social order, content to identify themselves with their social function, however lowly, thereby assuming the fixed role conferred on them by others.

The "salauds" are those unthinking beings who are ignorant of the need to discover a meaning for existence since they already believe that they have found their justification in the morality of convention. But Roquentin sets himself apart from the mob.

"Adieu beaux lis tout en finesse dans vos petits sanctuaires peints, adieu beaux lis, notre orgueil et notre raison d'être. Adieu salauds."
(N. p.122)

In scorning convention and conformity, he finds himself alone with his consciousness. The bourgeois reactionary

never achieves this state of inner vision as he either has not experienced Roquentin's metaphysical nausea or else has suppressed it.

Sartre does not intend us to think of Roquentin's experience as exceptional or abnormal. He believes such "nausea" belongs within the experience of everyone since the measure of man's humanity is, for Sartre, that he lucidly accepts the anguish of his condition and explores it to its limit. The value of "nausea" is that it reveals a true awareness of the fundamental absurdity and contingency of existence and those who would evade this tragic issue by constructing a screen of illusions to protect themselves are guilty of self-deception.

"Exister, c'est être là, simplement;.....Il y a des gens, je crois, qui ont compris ça. Seulement ils ont essayé de surmonter cette contingence en inventant un être nécessaire et cause de soi. Or aucun être nécessaire ne peut expliquer l'existence. La contingence.... c'est l'absolu, par conséquent la gratuité parfaite. Tout est gratuit, ce jardin, cette ville et moi-même. Quand il arrive qu'on s'en rende compte, ça vous tourne le cœur et tout se met à flotter, comme l'autre soir, au "Rendez-Vous des Cheminots": voilà la Nausée; voilà ce que les salauds.....essaient de se cacher avec leur idée de droit." (N. p.166)

This wilful suppression of awareness is termed "mauvaise foi" and is the opposite of the sincerity or authenticity which Sartre proposes as a moral criterion. For if men as free beings are the creators of their own values they should at least be true to these values otherwise such values are meaningless and empty. Roquentin, all too conscious of the insincerity of the attitudes of the Bouvillois, undertakes to purge himself of inauthenticity. In a lucid revolt he refuses their poses, illusions, and attitudes. Yet he sees others playing their parts so well and so unquestioningly that it frightens him for he alone seems not content to fit into a ready-made mould. Consciously desirous of sincerity he refuses to conform to a codified existence and thereby compromise his essential freedom which is the power to change.

By rejecting the bad faith of comfortable illusions Roquentin becomes receptive to the revelation of the nature of existence through the experience of "nausea". His awareness of the external world is extremely acute and he is obsessed with the horrid disgust which material objects arouse in him.

His very reason for keeping a diary is in the hope of being able to analyse and thereby understand the

strange experiences he has recently encountered.

"Quelque chose m'est arrivé... C'est venu à la façon d'une maladie... Je crois que c'est moi qui ai changé" he explains. (N. p.15-16)

His first inkling of this is apparently a minor matter but a significant one. Although by his own admission he takes a pleasure in picking up dirty old bits of rag and paper -

"Il m'est agréable de les prendre, de fermer ma main sur eux; pour un peu je les porterais à ma bouche, comme font les enfants." (N. p.22)

- he suddenly finds himself quite unable to touch a scrap of muddy, rain-soaked paper.

"Je n'ai pas pu ramasser le papier c'est tout... Je ne suis plus libre, je ne peux plus faire ce que je veux." (N. p.22-23)

Objects have assumed a living presence, have become "des bêtes vivantes", and he realises that he is actually afraid to be touched by them. For now tactile sensations seem transferred; he does not touch objects, instead he feels them touch him. After this realisation has come to him he is better able to understand the feeling he had when at the seaside he held a pebble in his hand and it provoked "une espèce d'écœurement douceâtre...une sorte de nausée dans les mains." (N. p.23)

Similar incidents follow and Roquentin faithfully chronicles his experience of nauseating disgust when he

touches a door knob, or looks at a glass of beer, or at the braces of the cafe owner. As he shakes the Autodidacte's hand it doesn't seem like a human hand at all. Even his own body has become an alien thing and the reflection of his face in the mirror rouses no real recognition; it is simply "une chose grise".

Objective reality has ceased to be recognizable. Instead it has become an incomprehensible chaos of shaky viscosity threatening to engulf him. Objects have the power to seem to be totally different to what they are. Their given names are therefore meaningless, as Roquentin discovers when, sitting in a tram he realizes the word "seat" is ridiculously inapplicable to the object it is supposed to name. Words are just man's futile gesture to impose a meaning in an incomprehensible world.

"Je murmure: c'est une banquette, un peu comme un exorcisme. Mais le mot reste sur mes lèvres: il refuse d'aller se poser sur la chose....Les choses se sont délivrées de leur noms. Elles sont là, grotesques, têtues, géantes et ça paraît imbécile de les appeler des banquettes ou de dire quoi que se soit sur elles: je suis au milieu des choses, les innomables. Seul, sans mots, sans défenses, elles m'environnent, sous moi, derrière moi, au-dessus de moi." (N. p.159)

The climax of his metaphysical experience comes as he gazes at the root of a chestnut tree in the park. This time his nausea is of greater than usual intensity and in a blinding flash (an "illumination" he calls it) he suddenly understands what it means "to exist".

What first becomes evident to him is that no object retains its own identity; they are all part of the one sticky mess.

"La diversité des choses, leur individualité n'était qu'une apparence, un vernis. Ce vernis avait fondu; il restait des masses monstrueuses et molles, en désordre - nues, d'une effroyante et obscène nudité." (N. p.162)

The second part of his revelation concerns the superfluosity of all existing things.

"Nous étions un tas d'existants gênés, embarrassés de nous-mêmes, nous n'avions pas la moindre raison d'être là, ni les uns ni les autres, chaque existant, confus, vaguement inquiet, se sentait de trop par rapport aux autres. DE TROP: c'était le seul rapport que je pusse établir entre ces arbres, ces grilles, ces cailloux..... Et MOI - MOI AUSSI J'ETAIS DE TROP." (N. p.163)

Having realised that all things are superfluous and unnecessary he is faced with the subsequent realisation of the absurdity of a universe where nature provides no absolute law. Existence is purely gratuitous with a total absence of logical necessity. Since there is no ultimate reason for existing the world is reduced to absurdity.

"Le mot d'Absurdité naît à présent sous ma plume; ...Je comprenais que j'avais trouvé la clé de l'Existence, la clé de mes Nausées, de ma propre vie. De fait, tout ce que j'ai pu saisir ensuite se ramène à cette absurdité fondamentale." (N. p.164)

Thus the human consciousness is depicted as trapped in an alien, incomprehensible world. And because it feels 'de trop' in a superfluity of objects, that consciousness is nauseated and "angoissé" at its own absurdity.

But the anguish of such a total absence of nationality and necessity is unbearable and Roquentin seeks refuge from the nightmarish viscosity of existence. During his supreme experience of Nausea he has realised that he, like everything else, is "de trop". This he understands with his mind but as yet does not feel it subjectively. The fear that he will drives him to consider suicide as a means of escape.

"Je rêvais vaguement de me supprimer, pour anéantir au moins une de ces existences superflues. Mais ma mort même eut - été de trop." (N. p.163)

Even his death would be meaningless and so provide no escape from absurdity.

Nor can he ignore his experiences and fall back on the illusory values of the "salauds" which he has categorically rejected as insincere, for then he too would be guilty of "bad faith".

Unlike the Autodidacte - that cruelly comic caricature of a "culture vulture" avidly devouring every book in the

library in alphabetical order - Roquentin cannot accept traditional humanist concepts of the nobility of man and the benevolence of Nature. Such lofty ideals are figuratively demolished when the Autodidacte is humiliated by being caught in the act of performing a minor indecency:

"Tout s'est écroulé d'un coup, ses rêves de culture, ses rêves d'entente avec les hommes."
(N. p.201)

Whereas the characters of Malraux or Saint-Exupéry may find their raison d'être in living for the present moment of excitement, Roquentin cannot return to his former active life of travel and adventure for he has discovered that "adventure" is a fictitious concept, something which may be anticipated or seen in retrospect but which at the time is not in itself significant. His former mistress, Anny, is guilty of a similar deception in her longing for "perfect moments". But when he meets her again she too has become disillusioned with this ideal of "perfect moments" which corresponded to his desire for "adventures".

"Il n'y a pas d'aventures - il n'y a pas de moments parfaits....nous avons perdu les mêmes illusions, nous avons suivi les mêmes chemins." (N. p.188)

Anny's unexpected letter asking him to see her in Paris has given him a sort of hope of re-establishing a

communion with another human being and therefore of escaping his alienation and nausea but in this respect their reunion is a complete failure. She has changed and with disillusionment her life is now as aimless as his. They cannot communicate or understand each other. As he is on the point of leaving he says:

"Alors, il faut que je te quitte après t'avoir retrouvée."
 "Non, dit-elle lentement, non. Tu ne m'as pas retrouvée."" (N. p.193)

Back in Bouville Roquentin realises:

"J'avais compte sur Anny pour me sauver ...
 Anny n'est revenue que pour m'ôter tout espoir." (N. p.196)

Resigning himself to the fact that there can be no escape from his anguish, Roquentin decides to leave Bouville and live instead in Paris. Not that he expects to be free from his nausea in Paris, for one city is very much like another and all are threatened by the slimy "Vegetation" which he imagines lurking for the opportunity to engulf them.

But, surprisingly, as he is waiting for his train, passing the time drinking in the cafe, Roquentin experiences another illumination - this time not of nausea and anguish but the means of salvation for them. The waitress plays for him for the last time a record which he has heard on several previous occasions. As he listens to the song

- an American jazz number "Some of these Days" sung by a Negress, it seems to him that the melody is something pure and necessary. It is "une souffrance-modèle" which does not "exist", it simply is. "C'est comme moi qu'il faut être; il faut souffrir en mesure" the melody tells him, for the melody belongs to a realm beyond existence.

He thinks of the composer and the singer who, by the rhythmic purity of this melody, have been able to transcend the plane of existence.

"En voilà deux qui sont sauvés: le Juif et la Negresse. Sauvés. Ils se sont peut-être cru perdus jusqu'au bout, noyés dans l'existence. Et pourtant, personne ne pourrait penser à moi comme je pense à eux, avec cette douceur. Personne, pas même Anny. Ils sont un peu pour moi comme des morts, un peu comme des héros de roman; ils se sont lavés du péché d'exister. Pas complètement, bien sûr - mais tout autant qu'un homme peut faire. Cette idée me bouleverse tout d'un coup, parce que je n'espérais même plus ça. Je sens quelque chose qui me frôle timidement et je n'ose pas bouger parce que j'ai peur que ça ne s'en aille. Quelque chose que je ne connaissais plus: une espèce de joie."
(N. p.221)

Thus Roquentin discovers the intimation of his own redemption. By substituting the harmonious world of artistic creation for the viscosity of the objective world he can perhaps escape human anguish. A creative act will give some meaning to his life. He will write a book,

but not like his abandoned work on M. de Rollebon for that was merely an attempt to reconstruct the past. Actually writing the book, he knows, will be a dreary day to day chore but:

"Mais il viendrait bien un moment où le livre serait écrit, serait derrière moi et je pense qu'un peu de sa clarté tomberait sur mon passé. Alors peut-être que je pourrais, à travers lui, me rappeler ma vie sans répugnance."
(N. p.222)

His book will have the same sort of necessity as the melody and he will then be able to accept his own existence, at least in the past.

Critical opinion is sharply divided about Roquentin's problem of the nausea of existence being overcome by this "aesthetic solution". Some have interpreted the ending as purely ironical, with Antoine Roquentin falling into the trap of self-deception by accepting, as an escape, an illusion which is just as false and invalid as the other illusions he so caustically rejects. Certainly it is quite unexpected that he should discover any solution at all considering his previous anguish and despair. As Claude-Edmonde Magny (5) points out, one may wonder if this is not a last minute "conversion in extremis" to hope, the weakness of the flesh being ultimately unable to accept what the mind in its moments of lucidity has confirmed.

The fact that Roquentin should have perceived the intimations of his salvation through a piece of music, however unprepossessing, is the more surprising since just prior to this he has, in typically venomous vein, dismissed the notion of finding consolation in music. When the record begins playing he thinks:

"Dire qu'il y a des imbéciles pour puiser des consolations dans les Beaux-arts. Comme ma tante Bigeois: 'Les Préludes de Chopin m'ont été un tel secours à la mort de ton pauvre oncle'." (N. p.217)

It is indeed ironical that immediately following this outburst he should find himself succumbing to the appeal of melody. But could not this abrupt volte face be indicative of the genuineness of his revelation? For surely he knows himself too well by now to be duped into voicing a solution which he does not believe in and it would be totally out of character if, after his tireless search for sincerity, he were to embrace an unauthentic attitude at this advanced stage.

I believe that Roquentin happens upon this means of salvation in all good faith. After all the impact of the novel would be seriously impaired if the conclusion was a rejection of all that had preceded it, and the whole

point of La Nausée is that one should discover the real nature of existence, accept its absurdity, and strive for a sincere *modus vivendi* in spite of this. If Roquentin sincerely accepts this means of giving his life a purpose, justification through art is valid for him. I do not think that this is merely a convenient device inserted by the author to solve his hero's predicament.

One must take into account that this is Sartre's first novel and written reasonably early in his writing career. As such we must accept it at its face value and not be tempted to impose on it an interpretation perhaps more in keeping with his way of thinking as it is revealed in later works.

In Les Mots, Sartre, referring to his first novel, tells us: "J'étais Roquentin, je montrais en lui, sans complaisance, la trame de ma vie;" (M. p.210) There are obvious biographical parallels of people and places - Bouville, for instance, is known to represent Le Havre where Sartre was "exiled" to teach for a time. More than this Roquentin's thoughts and feelings, his discovery of the nature of existence and his obsessive hallucinations, are drawn directly from Sartre's own experience of such. But the simple equation, Roquentin equals Sartre, will

not suffice and Sartre immediately emphasises: "...en même temps j'étais moi, l'élu, annaliste des enfers....." (M. p.210) He was himself in the character of Roquentin as well as being the creator of that character. His reader is, therefore, surely entitled to expect sincerity, not irony, in his conclusion.

Sartre has spoken of his youthful belief in the mystique of literature as a means of salvation and his attitude towards literature remained fundamentally unchanged in the early part of his writing career. Just when this attitude did change is difficult to determine but it is possible that at the time of writing La Nausée he was still thinking in terms of the possibility of salvation through art, (although Francis Jeanson ⁽⁶⁾ assures us that at this stage Sartre had already rejected the aesthetic solution). This is a matter which Sartre proposes answering in a further autobiographical volume. Until then one can only speculate. We do know that at some stage he is disillusioned with the powers of literature but he continues to write nevertheless:

"...n'importe; je fais, je ferais des livres, il en faut; ...La Culture ne sauve rien ni personne, elle ne justifie pas. Mais c'est un produit de l'homme; il s'y projette, s'y reconnaît; seul, ce miroir critique lui offre son image." (M. p.211)

So despite his disillusionment Sartre is even now bound to recognise the humanistic value of art and letters.

A little further on in Les Mots, speaking of his dedication to a writing career, he notes the protective role of this "folie":

"...ma seule affaire était de me sauver - rien dans les mains, rien dans les poches - par le travail et la foi....sans équipement, sans outillage je me suis mis tout entier à l'oeuvre pour me sauver tout entier." (M. p.212)

Writing therefore has an intensely personal importance for him, and note his repeated reference to his "salvation". In retrospect he can see his creative activity of the La Nausée period as his chosen project, as a "névrose" (M. p.13) preserving him from reality. In terms of his own work then, it was the very aesthetic, or literary, solution which allowed him to escape the anguish of Roquentin.

Yet, as Miss Murdoch (7) notes, the conclusion of La Nausée is merely sketched in and not sufficiently developed to pose as a real solution to Roquentin's problem. The novel really has no conclusion in the true sense of the word, it just happens to stop at the point in Roquentin's existence when, beset by anguish, he perceives a possible

salvation. Whether or not it would become his actual salvation we are not in a position to know, although by not elaborating the suggestion, Sartre is perhaps implying that this is in fact no remedy. Roquentin is "sans importance collective....tout juste un individu", who can see no salvation in personal relationships, in political action, or social function, and who has rejected the notion of "adventure" as giving a meaning to life. He may well find artistic endeavour equally unsatisfying. I think that the way of aesthetic redemption offered at the end of La Nausée is a belief which he sincerely held at the time but which would later be rejected as only a temporary refuge, if any, from metaphysical "angoisse".

At the time of writing the novel, Sartre was no doubt fully aware that a solution could be found only by facing the problem and not by escaping from it by art or by any other external means. La Nausée has served to illustrate the more negative side of his philosophy. The attempt to be positive will follow later. As a cure for the anguish of a consciousness forced to recognise absurdity, Sartre is to propose a more rigorous solution whereby man is to be called upon to seek his freedom and affirm his responsibility for his destiny even in the face of Nothingness and Absurdity. This theme is to form a basis for the novel sequence Les Chemins de la Liberté to which we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER III

L'AGE DE RAISON

L'Age de Raison was published in 1945 as the first volume of Sartre's intended tetralogy entitled Les Chemins de la Liberté. Of the three volumes which have been completed, this first is the one which could most easily stand alone as a single novel. The events in the lives of the characters with which the book deals take place in 1938 and, although one senses that the characters are caught up in the rising tension of the pre-war era, the atmosphere of this novel is less situated in the historical context than is the case with the subsequent volumes. The problems which confront the characters are of a specifically personal nature and require an individual solution.

For Sartre man's ability to desire and assert his freedom is his distinctive characteristic and Sartre's intention in Les Chemins de la Liberté, as the title itself indicates, is to study the various ways in which his characters seek their freedom. Mathieu Delarue, thirty-four year old philosophy teacher at a Paris lycée, is the chosen subject for detailed study in L'Age de Raison. The consciousnesses of other characters, particularly Daniel and Brunet, in their pursuit of freedom are also

examined in the course of the book but in less depth and as a contrast to the main character. Mathieu Delarue, as the principal protagonist of the novel, provides the unity for the work since he is directly involved with the main features of the plot and he is also the focus from which radiate the secondary characters and the sub-themes concerning them. I should like first to examine the details of the actual plot of L'Age de Raison in order to establish the relationships between characters and events and their relationships with each other. Then I wish to look more closely at the character of Mathieu as it emerges in the course of the novel, and to trace the development of his consciousness in attaining the "age of reason."

The physical action of this novel is concerned mainly with Mathieu's efforts to obtain the necessary money to enable his pregnant mistress, Marcelle, to have an abortion. Although she has been his mistress for seven years, when she informs him of her pregnancy it does not occur to Mathieu to marry her and let her keep the baby. He dismisses this possibility outright for two reasons - firstly because he has grown tired of her and no longer loves her; secondly, a reason which is of more importance

to Mathieu, he prides himself on his independence and to allow himself to slip easily into the ready-made roles of husband and father would be to compromise his precious "freedom". However, his request for a loan is refused by Daniel, his friend, out of malice, and by his bourgeois brother Jaques out of a misguided notion that it is for Mathieu's own good. It is only when he finds such difficulty in obtaining the 4,000 francs needed that Mathieu begins to consider marrying Marcelle.

At the same time as Mathieu is engaged upon his humiliating and futile search for money he is wrestling with the emotional problems caused by his obsession with a young Russian girl, Ivich. She is a curious character, bearing a striking resemblance to the petulant Xavière of Simone de Beauvoir's novel L'Invitée, (1). Ivich's perverse unpredictability, her ambivalent sexual tendencies, and her almost mystical communication with her brother Boris, make her something of an enigma, not fully elucidated by the author and apparently as unfathomable to Sartre as to his reader and to Mathieu. The image of youthfulness which both she and Boris present to him fascinates Mathieu who has a need for the company of young people for at thirty-four he already feels old.

Obsessed by his desire for freedom Mathieu has scorned family ties, avoided the social institution of marriage, and refused political or ideological affiliations. Nevertheless he knows that his life is empty and dessicated. He has no sense of purpose and is aware that for years he has deceived himself into believing that a sort of "availability" to whatever the future might bring is indeed freedom. He longs for some free act which will give meaning to his dreary existence but being a man incapable of decisive action he expects freedom to descend upon him like a sort of Grace.

This inability to act is characterized by the motif running through the book of Mathieu's nagging feelings of guilt about remaining uninvolved in the Spanish Civil War. In fact the novel opens with this motif. Mathieu encounters a drunken beggar who, in return for charity, gives him a Spanish postage stamp saying that he had wanted to go and fight in Spain only "ça ne s'est pas arrangé." (AR. p.10) Refusing his offer of a drink, a thing he would not have done once upon a time, Mathieu puts the stamp in his pocket and later shows it to Marcelle when he visits her.

As he enters her room he feels that he is entering a shell. Wallace Fowlie ⁽²⁾ has pointed out the symbolism

of this room with its flesh pink walls seeming to close in on him just as Marcelle's pregnancy offers a trap to Mathieu's freedom. Marcelle is treated somewhat unsympathetically by her author. She is shown as a passive and weak character who, knowing Mathieu's views on his independence, does not expect marriage but is quite resigned to having an abortion. But Daniel, her "archangel", is to put the idea into her mind that she really wants to keep the baby. Sartre uses Marcelle to give vent to his horror of the flesh. Mathieu is appalled at the thought of his child growing in her womb and he cannot prevent a feeling of loathing and disgust as he looks at Marcelle's body. Like Roquentin in his moments of nausea, he experiences the disturbing sensation of the room and its objects seeming to assume an altered appearance as he realizes the situation to the full.

When Mathieu leaves we are shown an instance of Sartre's theory of "le regard" acting as a fixitive on the consciousness. Hoping to hide his guilt in the darkness of the night, Mathieu suddenly senses the weight of Marcelle's thoughts of him even though she can no longer see him. At once he feels that he is being judged and to escape the presence of her consciousness he enters a bar where he will be physically seen by consciousnesses other

than hers who see him differently.

Leaving the bar he goes to see the abortionist Marcelle has in mind but seeing the squalid filth of her rooms he is beset by his scruples and cannot allow Marcelle to go there. He goes to Sarah for advice. Looking at her child, Pablo, he realizes that his own child is already an incipient consciousness and is uneasy that he should be about to prevent its existence. Sarah tells him of a "reputable" doctor, a Jewish refugee whose fee is 4,000 francs.

Again Mathieu is reminded of the Spanish War and his own inertia for Sarah's husband, Gomez, is fighting in Barcelona and when Mathieu arrives his one-time friend Brunet is there. Brunet is a thorn in Mathieu's conscience for whereas Mathieu reflects, Brunet acts. Mathieu envies him since as an active member of the Communist Party he has found a cause with which to identify himself. "Il est plus libre que moi: il est d'accord avec lui-même et d'accord avec le Parti," (AR. p.129) thinks Mathieu. In this later scene at Mathieu's apartment Brunet tries to persuade him too to opt for active commitment to the Party. He tells Mathieu: "Tu as renoncé à tout pour être libre. Fais un pas de plus, renonce à la liberté

elle-même: et tout sera rendu." (AR. p.127)

Realizing that it has now become impossible for him to communicate with Brunet on a purely personal level, Mathieu knows that by joining the Communist Party he could re-establish their former friendship, which has evidently meant a great deal to him. His political sympathies, although unstated, naturally lie with the Left and he would like to acknowledge them. "Entrer au Parti, donner un sens a sa vie, choisir d'etre un homme, agir, croire. Ce serait le salut," (AR. p.129) are the thoughts which tempt him. But lacking Brunet's decisiveness he refuses to commit himself because he does not consider that he has reason enough to do so, and for the reflective Mathieu with his analytical lucidity reasons are all important.

In the meantime, however, Mathieu has still been trying to solve his immediate problem. Daniel has refused to lend him the money, although in a position to do so, and Mathieu is forced to humiliate himself by applying to his brother Jaques. Jaques is quick to point out that he is compromising his "principles" in resorting to family ties when he needs a loan although otherwise he rejects them completely. Principles are all very well in theory, he tells Mathieu "...mais il me semble qu'avec tes idées, j'aurais à coeur de ne rien

demander à un affreux bourgeois, car je suis un affreux bourgeois, ajouta-t-il en riant de bon cœur." (AR. p.110)

Clearly Sartre does not intend that we should prefer Jaques to Mathieu - he is pompous, self-satisfied, and of course a typical bourgeois "salaud" in Sartre's eyes - but ironically enough it is Jaques who enlightens Mathieu as to a few home-truths about his so-called "freedom" and his bad-faith and self-deception. "C'est ta vie tout entière qui est bâtie sur un mensonge," (AR. p.114) he tells Mathieu. In fact Mathieu is as much a bourgeois as he is but will not admit it.

"...Ecoute, dit Mathieu, il y a un malentendu entre nous: je me soucie fort peu d'être ou de n'être pas un bourgeois. Ce que je veux simplement c'est... - il acheva entre ses dents serrées avec une sorte de honte-garder ma liberté.

....J'aurais cru, moi, dit Jaques, que la liberté consistait à regarder en face les situations où l'on s'est mis de son plein gré et à accepter toutes ses responsabilités, Mais ça n'est sans doute pas ton avis: tu condamnes la société capitaliste, et pourtant tu es fonctionnaire dans cette société, tu affiches une sympathie de principe pour les communistes: mais tu te gardes bien de t'engager, tu n'as jamais voté. Tu méprises la classe bourgeoise et pourtant tu es bourgeois, fils et frère de bourgeois et tu vis comme un bourgeois." (AR. p.115)

In spite of a lingering sense of guilt, shame, and inferiority, Mathieu does not concede that Jaques may be right.

Mathieu's next opportunity is provided by Boris who tells him that Lola keeps a large sum of money in her room. Knowing that she dislikes him Mathieu will not ask her and she refuses Boris's request for money on a friend's behalf. In the previous pages of the novel we have seen quite a lot of Boris, mainly in his association with Lola, a night-club singer considerably older than himself, who clings to her youthful lover in a desperate attempt to preserve her own youth. This relationship provides a parallel to Mathieu's obsession with Ivich. Boris, Ivich's brother, is a self-consciously young nineteen-year-old whose wish is to die at twenty-five so as not to grow old. He does not love Lola and their physical relationship is repugnant to him but her maturity gives him the security he lacks. A peculiar quirk in his character is his passion for stealing - simply because he is fascinated by the psychology and technique of theft. What he steals is not important; as long as the theft is well executed, as blatantly as possible, Boris feels a triumphant satisfaction.

His affection and admiration for Mathieu, his former mentor, amounts to an almost idolatrous veneration and he is a fervent disciple of Mathieu's teaching regarding freedom which he accepts unquestioningly.

"On a le devoir de faire tout ce qu'on veut, de penser tout ce qui vous semble bon, de n'être responsable que devant soi-même et de remettre en question, constamment, tout ce qu'on pense et tout le monde. Boris avait bâti sa vie là-dessus et il était scrupuleusement libre: en particulier, il remettait toujours le monde en question, sauf Mathieu et Ivich; ces deux-là, c'était tout à fait inutile, attendu qu'ils étaient parfaits. Quant à la liberté, il n'était pas bon non plus de s'interroger sur elle, parce qu'alors on cessait d'être libre." (AR. -.147)

When Boris, believing Lola is dead, appeals to Mathieu to help him recover some letters he had written to her, Mathieu goes to her room and gets them from the locked case where she also keeps her banknotes. Here is the money he needs but his bourgeois sense of morality will not permit him to steal them. He leaves but changes his mind and goes back when he considers it is his duty to Marcelle to get the money one way or another, however, by this time Lola has roused from her drugged coma and the opportunity is gone. Bitterly Mathieu reproaches himself:

"Je n'ai pas pu prendre l'argent; ma liberté c'est un mythe....Vouloir ce que je suis, c'est la seule liberté qui me reste. Ma seule liberté: voulais épouser Marcelle." (AR. p.229)

But he knows that in this too he is only trying to deceive himself. To abandon Marcelle, that would be an

act of real freedom, but he cannot bring himself to do it. As a last resort he tries to raise finance through a money-lender but since formalities would take too long he resigns himself to marrying Marcelle. Almost immediately he rebels against his indifference, realizing that whatever happens it will be of his choosing. As a hypochondriac enjoys illness, Mathieu's self-pity relishes this "condemnation" to liberty.

"Il était seul, au milieu d'un monstrueux silence, libre et seul, sans niche et sans excuse, condamné à décider sans recours possible, condamné pour toujours à être libre." (AR. p.258)

But actually he does not have to "decide" anything. The matter is taken quite out of his hands by, of all persons, Daniel. This same Daniel who earlier refused to lend him the money to get him out of his predicament now, surprisingly, informs him that he is to marry Marcelle, ostensibly so that she may keep the baby. But his price for thus safeguarding Mathieu's independence is to oblige him to hear his confession of homosexuality. Daniel's motive is partly to rid himself of some of his guilt since there will be "quelqu'un qui sait" (AR. p.316) but Mathieu is hardly the type to be shocked by such an admission.

John Weightman (3) suggests that: "it never seems to occur to him (Mathieu) that there is a moral problem in allowing the child to be born into the rather wierd menage that Daniel and Marcelle will form." This is not so. Without consciously knowing why, Mathieu is uneasy about the idea of their marriage even though it will provide a way out for him, and this is before Daniel's confession. Following this Mathieu has sufficient moral conscience to realize that he cannot allow Marcelle to marry Daniel and he immediately telephones her to say he wants to marry her after all. But by now it is too late to repair the damage of their earlier quarrel and she hangs up on him. The outcome becomes irrevocable - Marcelle will marry Daniel.

Daniel is an altogether strange, somewhat menacing character. Like Roquentin in La Nausée he is obsessed by the elusiveness of his own existence. The problem of achieving self-coincidence, of changing the non-being of his consciousness into a stable being, has become a constant obsession with him, no doubt because of the particular nature of his case. Daniel is a homosexual who is unable to accept himself for what he is and therefore lives a life of complicated deception, even lying to himself. He cannot experience the coincidence of his

being with his vice. Rather he is at the one time himself and a detached observer of himself, as if he were two different people. This almost schizophrenic incapacity to realize he is what he is, is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the scene at the Kermesse where he knowingly watches an older man strike up an acquaintance with a younger man. Daniel is maliciously enjoying humiliating them by his observation when he is greeted by one of his own former lovers, Bobby. Immediately he is reduced to humiliated shame and disgust at being recognized as the same as those he had been observing with such callous detachment.

Deeply conscious of his sexual abnormality, although it seems quite unreal to him, Daniel resorts to self-torment in one form or another as a punishment or expiation for his guilt. He is the would-be sado-masochist who, by assuming the dual role of tormentor and tormented, hopes to achieve some measure of self-identification which he can not otherwise experience.

It is surely this masochistic tendency which causes him to define "freedom" as "to do the opposite to what one wishes." This is not real freedom, as Mathieu is quick to realize, but it is the only sort of freedom

Daniel knows since it fulfils his need for self-punishment and perhaps therefore grants him a little temporary peace of mind. For Daniel is very much aware of his separation from those other "normal" people who are at peace with themselves, that is, who have learned to accept their own nature.

In contrast to those normal "hommes de bonne volonté": "Daniel était un homme de mauvaise volonté," (AR. p.145) hating himself and others. He has already manifested the malicious side of his nature in his contrariness in not lending Mathieu money when in a position to do so, for no other reason than pure spite. For Daniel, returning from his futile attempt to drown his beloved cats as a gesture of self-punishment, finds Mathieu's air of superiority and "normalité" unbearable. When he learns the reason for Mathieu's request Daniel relishes the awkwardness of his friend's situation and almost against his will, he refuses to reach for the money in his wallet which would solve Mathieu's problem. He has a generous side to his nature and his first impulse is to help Mathieu but instead finds himself withholding his assistance. For this life of deception has become so habitual that Daniel is constantly finding himself doing the opposite to what he would really want.

He knows quite well that Mathieu knows he has the money, for his excuses were hardly meant to be convincing, and he is disappointed that Mathieu bears him no ill-will in spite of this. "Il sait que j'ai l'argent et il ne me hait pas: qu'est-ce qu'il faut donc leur faire?"

(AR. p.105) His last phrase betrays his reason for acting so contrarily - his need to feel hated which is an extension of his obsession for punishment.

Also, not being at peace with himself, he envies Mathieu's apparent calm detachment:

"Pas un instant...il n'a cessé d'être pondéré, dispos, en parfait accord avec lui-même. Il est emmerdé, mais ça lui reste extérieur. An dedans il est chez soi."
(AR. p.105)

This appears to Daniel as precisely the sort of peaceful self-coincidence which he himself cannot attain and his jealousy arouses a desire for revenge. He cannot bear Mathieu's apparent "freedom" so to be instrumental in limiting this freedom would perhaps satisfy him and his final thought in the chapter is: "Tant de même, ça vaudrait mille s'il était obligé d'épouser Marcelle."
(AR. p.105)

He has already tried unsuccessfully to promote this end by telling Mathieu that here is a perfect opportunity

for "un acte de liberté," explaining that by liberty he understands "de faire exprès le contraire de ce qu'on veut. On se sent devenir un autre." (AR. p.104)

This type of "free act" is the sort of thing which Daniel consciously tries to perform all the time but it has no appeal for Mathieu. That is not the sort of freedom with which he is concerned.

By refusing to lend money for an abortion, and later by persuading Marcelle that she really wants to have her baby, Daniel is trying to force Mathieu into an unwanted marriage which will curb his independence, Daniel's motive being vengeance prompted by envy. Why, at the end of the book, he should suddenly take it upon himself to marry Marcelle is a matter for discussion.

Some critics, Wallace Fowlie for instance, (4) interprets this action as a final desperate bid for redemption on Daniel's part. It is clear that Henri Peyre, a very able Sartrian critic, also subscribes in passing to this motive of redemption. (5) Having failed to go through with the act of self-mutilation and suicide which will deliver him from his perversion, shortly afterwards, while regaining his composure in a bar, Daniel hits upon marrying Marcelle as the only possible means of

"deliverance" from his predicament. Since he cannot either come to terms with the role his nature imposes upon him, nor destroy his nature in the manner of the Old Testament recommendation: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out," by deliberately assuming a different role, that of Marcelle's "archangel", he can at least hope to achieve a measure of the stability of being, of self-coincidence, for which he longs and perhaps also find relative peace of mind.

I do think, however, that Fowlie is in error when he states that "The obstacle to his suicide is the new role he has to play for Marcelle, the new chance offered him to realize his prerogatives of archangel." (6) There is no "obstacle" to his committing the act and at the time Daniel himself is very much aware that there is nothing whatever to prevent it. "Rien ne le pousse à décider, rien ne l'en empêche." (AR. p.284) Even when he drops the razor he asks himself almost despairingly: "Rien ne m'empêchera donc de le prendre? Rien. Tout est inerte et tranquille." (AR. p.285) It is not his role of archangel which prevents him for he does not realize the possibility of this role until afterwards. When it comes to the point he is simply too afraid and quite incapable

of this final act of self-torture in exactly the same way as he was unable to drown his cats. Now, as then, he hesitates and is lost and in his heart he has to admit that all along he knew he would not be able to carry out his intention.

No doubt the hope of finding his salvation in the role of archangel is a part of Daniel's motive for his decision to marry Marcelle but I believe that an equally strong, if not stronger, motive is, once again, his obsessive need to punish himself. For the idea of marrying Marcelle occurs to him as the one action he can possibly take to replace the action of the self-mutilating suicide he is incapable of committing. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the same motivation applies - his unbearable guilty conscience at not being able to accept himself and the need to expiate this guilt by a self-inflicted punishment. Mathieu, not without a sense of horror and shock, recognizes Daniel's motive as just this. "Tu l'épouses pour te martyriser," he says, and Daniel cannot deny it. (AR. p.316)

Similarly the confession of his sexual abnormality is prompted by the same double motive. It is, as Fowlie puts it, "...a kind of capitulation to the world, a

worldly suicide. It is the demolishing of his social mask." (7) And if one accepts that by marrying Marcelle Daniel is indeed seeking redemption then one could interpret his confession almost as a preliminary "purification."

However, in confession his guilty secret Daniel is also once more trying to satisfy his craving for self torment. Mathieu, who knows Daniel's peculiarity in this respect, wonders, somewhat wearily: "Qu'est-ce qu'il lui a pris de venir se torturer chez moi?" (AR. p.313) Daniel cannot hate and despise himself enough to overcome his guilt and although to make his confession to Mathieu is not easy for him he forces himself to do it so that there will then be someone other than himself to judge him. Indeed the idea of confession his abnormality occurs to him in exactly those terms of judgement:

"Ah! n'importe qui, n'importe quel juge, il eut accepté n'importe quel juge mais pas lui-même, pas cet atroce mépris de soi qui n'avait jamais assez de force, ce faible, faible mépris moribond, qui semblait à chaque instant sur le point de s'anéantir et qui ne passait pas. Si quelqu'un savait, s'il pouvait sentir peser sur lui le lourd mépris d'un autre..." (AR. p.287)

But confession brings Daniel no relief, partly because he has no real sense of contrition, and partly because his

chosen confessor, Mathieu, is too broadminded to be the schocked, harsh judge Daniel needs.

Nevertheless, by the end of the book Daniel appears to have accepted himself. Or at least he understands more about his abnormality and the guilt it has brought him, and, realizing that: "tout les invertis sont honteux, c'est dans leur nature," (AR. p.316) he can at least learn to live with his guilt and shame.

It is with amazement, and envy, that Mathieu realizes that this time Daniel has really asserted his will and carried out his intended action thereby finding, so it seems to Mathieu, the "freedom" which has for so long eluded him despite his conscious efforts to attain it. Ironically Daniel points out that Mathieu is now free - that is, he can avoid restricting his independence by marriage with Marcelle, but sadly Mathieu sees that this is not freedom as he wants it. He is obliged to realize that whereas Daniel has chosen to act and that act which will change the course of his life is now irrevocable, everything he, Mathieu, has ever done or thought of doing has been for nothing.

"Moi, tout ce que je fais, je le fais pour rien; on dirait qu'on me vole les suites de mes actes; tout se passe comme si je pouvais toujours reprendre mes coups. Je ne sais pas

ce que je donnerais pour faire un acte irréversible." (AR. p.318)

The personal difficulty which confronts Mathieu in his desire to be "free" is that he is too indecisive to take positive action. Unlike Brunet who has made his choice and committed himself Mathieu always hesitates and intellectually considers various possibilities. But one can spend too much time theorizing and the result may be complete inaction, for by the time he has analysed the situation it is too late to decide on a course of action since circumstances may have changed in the meantime and the particular situation no longer exists. As Marchelle tells him, his life is full of "occasions manquées." (AR. p.16)

Mathieu is, as Iris Murdoch phrases it, "paralysed by his excessive lucidity." (8) As a teacher of philosophy he is too inclined to rationalize even about his own life. Everything he considers doing must have its reason. He would perhaps have gone to Spain, joined the Communist Party, married Marcelle, except that to the too rational Mathieu there simply did not seem sufficient reason to do so. (The only sort of unreasoned act which he can perform is typified by his stabbing a knife through his hand one evening at the Sumatra, partly in emulation of

Ivich, partly in defiance of her, But he is only too well aware of the folly of believing that this sort of meaningless action is an exercise of one's freedom.)

Lola complains to Boris of Mathieu that: "Il faut qu'il réfléchisse sur tout." (AR. p.33) But for Boris it is exactly this extreme lucidity in Mathieu's search for personal freedom which attracts awe and respect: "Toi, tu es libre sans le vouloir," he explains to Lola, "ça se trouve comme ça, voilà tout. Tandis que Mathieu, c'est raisonné." (AR. p.36) His young friends share this admiration for the man who so conscientiously seeks his freedom but Marcelle, with her insight, maintains that his desire for total freedom by means of lucid analysis is his "vice", and indeed this has been his obsession as well he knows.

"C'est comme ça qu'ils me voient, eux, Daniel, Marcelle, Brunet, Jaques: l'homme qui veut être libre...il veut être libre comme d'autres veulent une collection de timbres. La liberté, c'est son jardin secret. Sa petite connivence avec lui-même. Un type paresseux et froid, un peu chimérique mais très raisonnable au fond, qui s'est sournoisement confectionné un médiocre et solide bonheur d'inertie et qui se justifie de temps en temps par des considérations élevées." (AR. p.54)

It is evident, even at this early stage of the book that Mathieu is already aware of the dryness and sterility

of his life which his passion for analysis has created. He is beginning to see the emptiness of his notions of a reasoned freedom. "Je suis vieux. Me voilà affolé sur une chaise engagé jusqu'au cou dans ma vie et ne croyant à rien." (AR. p.54) He is dissatisfied with his life and rapidly losing faith in his quest for "freedom". The events of the novel, which after all occur within a short, 48 hour, period, merely serve to strengthen and confirm his growing disillusionment to the point where he is forced to admit that he has indeed attained "the age of reason."

When the pressures of an external reality suddenly threaten to invade his intellectual life where he so carefully cultivates his "freedom", Mathieu tries to convince himself that at all costs he must preserve this freedom. However, as these pressures recede from him with equal suddenness as the matter is put entirely out of his control, he is obliged to realize that his self-questioning and analysing were to no purpose. At the end of the book he is alone. He has lost Marcelle, the only other being with whom he shared any degree of communication; he has passed beyond his infatuation with Ivich who is returning to her home in the provinces; he is more than ever estranged from his one-time friends Daniel and Brunet,

and also of course from his brother Jaques. He is entirely alone, and, like Roquentin in La Nausée, he has experienced the Nothingness which is at the centre of his existence, thereby discovering that what he had thought to be the way to freedom was but an illusion.

"Pour rien: cette vie lui était donnée pour rien, il n'était rien et cependant il ne changerait plus: il était fait." (AR. p.319)

With a mixture of boredom and bitterness he accepts that he has finished with his youth (and the idealism which accompanied it), admitting that, in Jaques phrase, he has attained the "age of reason."

CHAPTER IV

LE SURSIS

In L'Age de Raison politics and world events remained incidental to the personal themes developed in the novel. Certainly Mathieu's sense of shame and guilt at not fighting in the Spanish Civil War is constantly present in his mind throughout the book, but apart from him, the characters show little concern with political considerations except for Brunet, the Communist Party member, and the Spanish Gomez, both of whom make only brief appearances. By contrast, in Le Sursis politics suddenly intrude upon the private lives and thoughts of every individual as the Munich crisis of 1938 brings the threat of war.

Not only are the characters of the previous volume of the novel sequence carried over into this, the second, volume, but a whole host of additional characters is introduced to create a vast panorama of individuals caught up in the universal upheaval of political crisis. As if to reinforce this idea of universality, actual historical figures are intermingled with the fictional characters and the people, whose lives we glimpse as they are affected in different ways by the collective destiny, comprise an

extensive range of personalities. If in L'Age de Raison Sartre was concerned basically with only one type of character - that of the rather bohemian intellectual - in Le Sursis he skilfully sketches a large number of characters very different in type, ranging from Gros Louis, the illiterate, simple-minded shepherd from the Cévennes, who cannot comprehend the circumstances which enmesh his life; to Philippe, pacifist and poet; the cowardly Pierre; Charles, a pathetic invalid; and ordinary Czechs and Germans involved in the dispute.

In an article in 1946 Sartre said that while reading a book by Dos Passos he conceived the idea of "weaving a novel out of various simultaneous lives, with characters who pass each other without ever knowing one another and who all contribute to the formation of the atmosphere of a moment of a historical period." (1) Thus all the individual consciousnesses represented in Le Sursis are seen as unified by their collective situation. To express this and to unite a multitude of characters and incidents, major and minor, and to link far-flung locations, Sartre has adopted the technique of simultaneity used by John Dos Passos in Manhattan Transfer and the U.S.A. trilogy. (2)

The Juxtaposition of people and places, and the rapid, unexplained transitions of the narrative from one individual or group to another and from one situation to another, which comprise this technique are not to be achieved easily. In the hands of a less able writer the result might well have been bewilderment on the part of the reader and a disappointing sense of confusion and lack of any controlling unity. In Le Sursis the theme of a universal threat of war which modifies the life and attitudes of each individual in a particular way, provides a strong unifying element for the novel. Indeed the simultaneous technique is admirably suited to capture the extent of the mounting tension of the pre-war situation, while at the same time, the rapid transitions among a range of people and places hint at the confusion which the situation creates in the minds of many who are directly or indirectly involved, and the social and personal upheaval which will inevitably result when war does come.

An accomplished manipulator of words and dialogue, Sartre displays his apparent mastery of this style of writing, although it certainly demands the reader's close attention and constant alertness in order to follow through the abrupt changes from one consciousness to

another, sometimes even in mid-sentence. A good example of how Sartre uses this simultaneity to reflect the same event in the minds of a number of people at the same time is to be found in the case where different characters are listening to the radio broadcast of Hitler's speech on the evening of the 26th September. Accompanying the usual juxtaposition of places, a linking narration takes a stream of consciousness form to which contribute the simultaneous thoughts and emotions of different people who are at the same time sharing the physical experience of hearing the speech. Thus the narration flashes from the thoughts of one of Hitler's soldiers, to those of a Jewess longing to kill Hitler, then includes a snatch of Hitler's speech, passes to Philippe's mental resolutions not to participate in the war, and finally to the words of Gomez in Spain:

"Mon Führer, mon Führer, tu parles et je suis changé en pierre, je ne pense plus, je ne veux plus rien, je ne suis que ta voix, je l'attendrais à la sortie, je le viserais au cœur, mais je suis en premier lieu le porte-parole des Allemands et c'est pour ces Allemands que j'ai parlé, assurant que je ne suis plus disposé à rester spectateur inactif et calme alors que ce dement de Prague croit pouvoir, je serai ce martyr, je ne suis pas parti pour la Suisse, à présent je ne peux plus rien faire qu'endurer ce martyre, je jure d'être ce martyr, je jure, je jure, je jure, chut, dit Gomez, nous écoutons le discours du pantin." (S. pp. 264-265)

Each one reacts differently, just as each of their lives is affected differently by the historical situation in which they find themselves confronted with the imminence of war.

Sartre is fascinated by his new "simultaneous" style which affords him ample opportunity to experiment and to display his technical virtuosity in using words. Unlike the style of La Nausée or L'Âge de Raison, which allowed the reader to peruse in some detail and at length the acts, thoughts, and changing attitudes of the characters, the technique of simultaneity allows, by comparison, only fleeting glimpses of the character of particular instances. Quite apart from these stylistic considerations, Sartre's main thematic preoccupation is to reveal the impact the political crisis has on each individual.

For these reasons it is hardly too surprising to find that the theme of personal freedom, which was embarked upon in the first volume of the cycle, is temporarily subjugated to the theme of the effects of the historical situation. This is not to say that it is entirely submerged or forgotten, for, although suspended for a time, it reappears towards the end of the book when again Sartre takes up the more personal philosophic themes to carry the plot of the first volume forward in the

sequence. But, on account of the theme developed in Le Sursis, a new dimension has been added to the problem of one's search for freedom.

Towards the end of L'Age de Raison Mathieu had commented to Daniel that in six months' time he would be exactly the same as he was then, ⁽³⁾ and in Le Sursis we find him little changed. For all his ironical claim to have attained "the age of reason" he is just a little older, not more mature. He is still deceiving himself, still obsessed with a desire for an elusive "liberté" and apparently no further advanced towards achieving his goal. He is still uncommitted to anything, still irresolute and seemingly incapable of positive action. Just as when considering marriage to Marcelle he hesitated so long that when he did finally reach a decision he was powerless to implement it, the situation having passed entirely from his control; so he spends too long trying to make up his mind whether or not to have an affair with Odette, his brother's wife, and once again events over-take him. This time his mobilization papers call him away to Paris and one more episode in his life is relegated to the file marked "occasions manquées."

But when the political situation erupts into a crisis in which all are involved a whole new area of possibility is opened up, not just for Mathieu but for everyone. In an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty the private destiny of each individual becomes uncertain. No-one can count on what his future will be and because it is indefinite it is full of possibility. The immediate likelihood of war disorients everything and the perspective which the characters had of their future, present, and past is altered accordingly. Robert Campbell ⁽⁴⁾ points out that a metamorphosis occurs in the consciousness of those who are to be mobilized and they judge the preceding years, not in the light of having lived through them, but in terms of the probable future.

"Il regardait ces vingt années qu'il avait vécues étales, ensoleillées, une plaine marine et il les voyait à présent comme elles avaient été: un nombre fini de journées comprimées entre deux hauts murs sans espoir, une période cataloguée, avec un début et une fin, qui figurerait dans les manuels d'histoire sous le nom d'Entre-deux-guerres. Vingt ans: 1918-1938. Seulement vingt ans! Hier ça semblait à la fois plus court et plus long: de toute façon on n'aurait pas eu l'idée de compter, puisque ça n'était pas terminé. A présent, c'est terminé. C'était un faux avenir. Tout ce qu'on a vécu depuis vingt ans, on l'a vécu a faux." (S. p. 274)

Not only does the historical past become "contaminated by the future" (5) but the past life of each individual is also affected. It becomes as if detached and impersonal, falsified by the future:

"Ils étaient tous là, enrôlés, morts, Marcelle, Ivich, Brunet, Boris, Daniel. Ils y étaient venus, ils s'y étaient pris, ils y resteraient. Les colères d'Ivich, les remontrances de Brunet, Mathieu s'en souvenait déjà comme de la mort de Louis XVI, avec la même impartialité. Elles appartenaient au passé du monde, pas au sien: il n'avait plus de passé." (S. p.279)

Disoriented from the past the characters are obliged to construct an imaginable future for themselves. The threat of war engulfing the individual who is totally impotent against it, allows Mathieu to look back in bitterness at his futile search for a false freedom. While crossing the Pont Neuf he realizes his mistake with sudden clarity. The semblance of freedom which he had tried to create by refusing all ties is a comforting but empty shell; real liberty is "une plénitude." The emotional and physical sensations which he experiences at this point are strongly reminiscent of Roquentin's flashes of awareness of the nature of the existence of external objects and his experience of the Nausea.

"Dehors. Tout est dehors.....Au dedans, rien, pas même une fumée, il n'y a pas de dedans, il n'y a rien. Moi: rien. Je suis libre, se dit-il, la bouche sèche." (S. p.295)

This leads him to the ironical discovery that:

"Cette liberté, je l'ai cherchée bien loin, elle était si proche que je ne pouvais pas la voir, que je ne peux pas la toucher, elle n'était que moi. Je suis ma liberté." (S. p.295)

He and his freedom are one and yet he doesn't know how to use it:

"Qu'est-ce que je vais faire de toute cette liberté? Qu'est-ce que je vais faire de moi?" (S. p.296)

Wearily he realizes: "Je suis libre pour rien." (S. p.296)

Somehow he must put his liberty to the test. The immediate alternatives (partir, rester, fuir,) are not sufficient to jeopardise his liberty and he contemplates suicide. If he drowns himself in the Seine his liberty (which has become "l'horrible, horrible liberté" S. p.297) would be annihilated too. His act would be "toute une loi, tout un choix, toute une morale" (S. p.297). It would be an absolute. For a moment the water below appears to hold his future when suddenly:

"il décida de ne pas le faire. Il décida:
 "Ce ne sera qu'une épreuve".....Ce sera pour
 la prochaine fois." (S. p.297)

This may be interpreted as indicative that Mathieu is still as incapable of resolute action as he ever was. But I think it is significant that Sartre should have worded the episode in such a way as to shift the emphasis to the idea that Mathieu's decision is the decision not to commit suicide. Perhaps the clue to this decision lies in the lines:

"Il n'avait pas de raison particulière pour se laisser couler, mais il n'avait pas non plus de raison pour s'empêcher." (S.p.297)

Mathieu, refusing any Gidean notion of an "acte gratuit", needs a reason for his action, one way or another, and more especially a reason to, than a reason not to. Since he has no reason to commit suicide the only reason which could prevent him from it is that, if he refuses the limited "future" of death, his future is still one of possibility in which he may be able to apply his newly-gained insight as to the nature of his freedom.

A little later, in the train, Mathieu appears to be looking forward to the new life which tomorrow holds for him, his past mistakes having been buried along with his falsified past:

"Mathieu eut un sursaut de joie: c'était fini. Demain, Nancy, la Guerre, la peur, la mort peut-être, la liberté. "Nous allons voir, dit-il. Nous allons voir." (S. p.327)

Mathieu finds in his pocket Daniel's letter telling him of his conversion to religion. For Daniel, burdened with the guilt and shame of his homosexuality, has been unable to attain the self-coincidence with his vice which might give him peace of mind, since he cannot either love or hate himself sufficiently:

"J'ai souvent souhaité me haïr....Mais cette hainese noyait dans mon inconsistance.....Je ne pouvais pas m'aimer non plus - j'en suis sûr, bien que je ne l'aie jamais tenté." (S. p.329)

Nor has he found any expiation in his role as Marcelle's "arch-angel". He finds comfort, however, in the notion of a God who knows all and sees all.

Another of the characters carried over from L'Age de Raison is Brunet, who sincerely wants the war to begin but is still struggling with his background of bourgeois and intellectual origins which prevent his total acceptance by the workers.

A future threatened by war also affects decisions made by Boris and Ivich. For Boris the events seem to be fulfilling the destiny he believes is his.

"Personnellement Boris n'avait jamais douté qu'elle ne finisse par éclater; il l'avait attendue comme un prince héritier qui sait, dès son enfance, qu'il est né pour régner."
(S. p.274)

Assuming this he signs up for three years in the army, a decision he is to regret when the crisis does not result in immediate war. Likewise Ivich, also believing that war will be declared, runs away from Laon to sleep with her boy-friend in Paris, an action which loses all meaning for her when war does not come.

But the tide of crisis recedes abruptly when the Munich agreement is reached. The nations and the individuals are granted a temporary "reprieve". The future they have anticipated is taken away from them and they are left to reconstruct their lives in terms of the past once again. For many of them, like those in the crowd waiting upon Daladier's return, the relief they feel is self-deception - the 1918-1938 period has been a prelude to war, and war will come.

For others, Boris, Ivich, Brunet, and particularly Mathieu, there is regret and a strong sense of having been cheated as once more they have to pick up the pieces of their former lives.

"C'est la journée des dupes", pensa-t-il.....
 Et ma vie à moi, qu'est-ce que je vais en
 faire?" C'était tout simple.....Il
 rentrerait chez lui, il mettrait la clé dans
 la serrure;Et rien ne se serait passé.
 Rien du tout.....il ne resterait plus que...
 le souvenir d'une nuit où il avait cru partir
 à la guerre." (S. p.361)

Mathieu's reaction is one of angry non-acceptance:

"Je ne veux pas, pensa-t-il en serrant les
 barreaux de toutes ses forces. Je ne veux pas!
 Cela na sera pas!".....N'importe qui; n'importe où.
 Il ne possédait plus rien, il n'était plus rien.
 La nuit sombre de l'avante-veille ne serait pas
 perdue, cet énorme remue-ménage ne serait pas tout
 à fait inutile...."Qu'ils fassent leur guerre,
 qu'ils ne la fassent pas, je m'en moque; je ne
 suis pas dupe.....Je resterai libre," pensa-t-il."
 (S. pp.361-362)

Taken overall the themes combined in Le Sursis
 point to the impossibility of trying to exert personal
 freedom in a vacuum, ignoring an historical or social
 context. Man is in fact controlled by the circumstances
 of his life and yet is free to adopt whatever attitude
 he chooses towards them. And the circumstances are not
 stable so that the course of an individual life cannot be.
 Mathieu may be able to conceive of a deliberately lived
 life but he cannot bring it into being.

CHAPTER VLA MORT DANS L'AME

The reprieve of the Munich conference only served to delay the war, not avert it, and La Mort dans l'Ame, the third published volume of the novel series, covers the period of the French defeat. Specifically the action of the novel takes place over the space of a few days, from 15th to 18th June, 1940.

Sartre is not concerned here to show the effects of the defeat of France in the way he described the effects of the Munich conference in the preceding novel. The reactions of the characters to events of the period are related but his primary objective is to resume following through the lives of the characters up to this point. For these reasons there is a marked difference in style between these two books although they are closely allied by the importance assumed in the novels by the historical situation. In La Mort dans l'Ame there are traces reminiscent of the style of Le Sursis, particularly in the linking of distant locations at a moment of time, but Sartre largely renounces the frequent and rapid

transitions from one set of characters to another. In many cases the time and place are specified in a sort of chapter heading. He allows the characters to appear for longer periods at a time, permitting their reactions to the impact of historical events to be observed at greater length and without interruption since there is more continuity within each chapter.

Instead of trying to incorporate a vast number of characters, as in Le Sursis, La Mort dans l'Ame concentrates on relatively few, taking the time to examine more fully the lives and individual problems of the principal characters. Some of the minor characters introduced in previous volumes continue to be followed up in this novel although their appearances are briefer. For instance there is Philippe, the pacifist, still lacking the courage to act upon his convictions, who encounters Daniel and whose life becomes involved with his. Marcelle does not actually appear in the novel but we learn that she and her baby are safe in Dax. Ivich has meantime married her lover and is living with her husband's parents whom she cannot bear. Boris has become a determined soldier. But most of the book centres on the three major characters - Daniel, Mathieu and Brunet.

When we last left Daniel he appeared to have found a solution for his problem of guilt and inability to accept himself as a homosexual. But evidently his conversion to religion was just another piece of self-deception and, as Maurice Cranston phrases it: "his religion turns out to be just as much a fraud as his marriage." (1)

A non-combattant, he is in Paris at the time of the arrival of the German troops. Philip Thody points out that: "He is delighted sexually by the beauty of the German soldiers and philosophically by the triumph they represent of Evil over Good." (2) Also, the taking of Paris provides him with the justification he seeks to relieve his guilt. He has looked on triumphantly as those who had condemned him as a homosexual, fled in panic before the advancing German army.

"...un procès en cours depuis vingt ans, des espions jusque sous son lit; chaque passant, c'était un témoin à charge ou un juge ou les deux; tout ce qu'il disait pouvait être retenu contre lui. Et puis, d'un seul coup, la débandade. Ils courent, les témoins, les juges, les hommes de bien, ils courent..... Moi, le Coupable, je règne sur leur ville."
(M.A. pp. 82-83)

In the near-deserted streets of Paris he sees the young Philippe and is at once attracted by him. Philippe

is trying to summon his nerve in order to drown himself in the Seine when Daniel intervenes and engages him in conversation. Delighting in "la longue patience p  d  rastique" which he has experienced so often before, Daniel takes the boy back to his apartment, but this time there is no accompanying sense of guilt. He plans to initiate Philippe into the systematic derangement of the senses as advocated by Rimbaud but at this point the novel leaves them. We do not know how their relationship develops and nor do we know if Daniel has really found a solution to his problem.

Apart from this further look at Daniel's life, La Mort dans l'Ame revolved in the main around Mathieu and Brunet. Structurally the novel falls into two divisions with Mathieu as the central figure of the first part, and Brunet assuming increasing significance as his role as the main protagonist is developed in the latter part of the book.

Mathieu is a private in a French regiment which has been retreating before the advancing German troops. In the disorganisation of the retreat the officers have deserted and Mathieu finds himself in a small French village with other soldiers. The demoralised men get

drunk as they await the final humiliation - The Armistice. But also in the village is a small group of Chasseurs, first-class soldiers whose patriotism and pride in themselves rule out any likelihood of them not fighting to the end, regardless of the odds against them and the futility of their resistance with the Armistice so near at hand.

"Si tu es chasseur, tu te bats." (M.A. p.173)

Mathieu and another soldier, rather than get drunk and await capture with the rest of their regiment, join these resisters in a last stand. The suicide squad takes up its position in the belfry of a tower which overlooks the road down which the Germans will advance. As he waits for the enemy's arrival and knows that his defiance will prove futile, Mathieu ponders one last question. He thinks: "Je vais mourir pour rien" and then wonders anxiously: "ai-je le droit de mourir pour rien?" (M.A. p.178) His question echoes his awareness of the absurdity of the action he is about to take. Angrily he makes his decision:

"Tant pis pour ceux d'en dessous, tant pis pour tout le monde. Finis les remords, les réserves, les restrictions: personne n'est mon juge, personne ne pense à moi, personne ne se souviendra de moi, personne ne peut décider pour moi....."

Je décide que la mort était le sens secret de ma vie, que j'ai vécu pour mourir; je meurs pour témoigner qu'il est impossible de vivre; mes yeux éteindront le monde et le fermeront pour toujours." (M.A. p.178)

He refuses any temptation to regard his decision to resist rather than to remain, safe and passive, in the cellar below, as an act of romantic heroism. The irrevocable consequences of his decision are to express revolt against the futility of his life and his false "liberte". For the first time the ineffectual Mathieu finds himself committed to a course of action and his whole being becomes intent upon putting up fifteen minutes of resistance, knowing all along that it is in vain. As he fires shot after shot in a frenzy of violence he takes glorious and spectacular revenge for all his past hesitations and failures.

"Il s'approcha du parapet et se mit à tirer debout. C'était une énorme revanche; chaque coup de feu le vengeait d'un ancien scrupule. "Un coup sur Lola que je n'ai pas osé voler, un coup sur Marcelle que j'aurais dû plaquer, un coup sur Odette que je n'ai pas voulu baiser. Celui-ci pour les livres que je n'ai pas osé écrire, celui-là pour les voyages que je me suis refusés, cet autre sur tous les types, en bloc, que j'avais envie de détester et que j'ai essayé de comprendre." Il tirait, les lois volaient en l'air, tu aimeras ton prochain comme toi-même, pan dans cette gueule de con, tu ne tueras point, pan sur le faux jeton d'en face. Il tirait sur l'homme, sur la Vertu, sur le Monde: la Liberté, c'est la Terreur; le feu brûlait dans la

mairie, brûlait dans sa tête: les balles sifflaient, libre comme l'air, le monde sautera, moi avec, il tira, il regarda sa montre: quatorze minutes trente secondes; il n'avait plus rien à demander sauf un délai d'une demi-minute, juste le temps de tirer sur le bel officier si fier qui courait vers l'église; il tira sur le bel officier, sur toute la Beauté de la Terre, sur la rue, sur les fleurs, sur les jardins, sur tout ce qu'il avait aimé. La Beauté fit un plongeon obscène et Mathieu tira encore. Il tira: il était pur, il était tout-puissant, il était libre." (M.A. p.197)

Despite the personal zest with which Sartre recounts this episode it would be erroneous to assume that he endorses Mathieu's discovery that "Liberty is Terror". The pitiful futility of the gesture and the impassioned rhetoric serve to emphasize the hollowness of Mathieu's motives. For Sartre the Hegelian concept of "terrorist liberty" is not true freedom. Mathieu does believe that he has at last found and asserted his freedom but in fact he has not discovered the meaning of true freedom, and Sartre intends us to see this as the last of Mathieu's many misconceptions about the nature of freedom.

Naturally we assume that Mathieu is killed after his violent outburst of vengeance although Sartre's attitude is ambiguous at this point. Originally the climax to Mathieu's story was not to have been his death in this manner. In 1946 Sartre had said that Mathieu would find his salvation in the final volume where he was to "commit himself to a free commitment which will give the world a meaning for him." (3) Since it is unlikely that he would

attempt to revive Mathieu at this stage we must assume that his intentions had altered in the meantime, but in view of this the value and validity of Mathieu's final gesture is seriously undermined.

With Mathieu thus disposed of, Brunet comes into the central spotlight and, in developing his story in part two of La Mort dans l'Ame, Sartre appears to be embarking on a more optimistic elaboration of his ideas on commitment and personal freedom.

While Mathieu is having his iconoclastic moment of glory up on the tower, Brunet is in the same village awaiting his capture along with the other soldiers in the cellar. Miss Murdoch sums up the contrast between these two characters when she says:

"Mathieu was in perpetual doubt, and casts himself away without a reason. Brunet is never in any doubt, and nurses himself for future tasks." (4)

A dedicated member of the Communist party, Brunet is

"one of those who think the question of liberty is solved in the Marxist definition of the word as 'the recognition of necessity'." (5)

Having resisted for as long as is practical, and believing

that it is senseless to be killed fighting a battle which is lost before it is begun, Brunet decides that the most logical course of action for him is to surrender to the Germans.

Whereas Mathieu acknowledged no reason to live, Brunet's political convictions provide him with a motive and he allows himself to be taken prisoner in order to continue the work of the Communist Party in the prisoner of war camps.

As soon as the soldiers have been rounded up in captivity he starts seeking out fellow Communist sympathizers in order to maintain their morale and impose on them and on himself a disciplined organisation in preparation for the time after the liberation.

"Il regarde à sa droite, à sa gauche, il se retourne, il cherche un visage pareil au sien parmi cette forêt de visages abandonnés, ivres, torturés par une gaieté irrépressible. Où sont les camarades? Un communiste, ça se reconnaît au premier coup d'œil. Un visage. Un seul visage dur et calme, un visage d'homme." (M.A. p.208)

The last pages of La Mort dans l'Ame are a vivid description of the captured French soldiers being transferred to Germany. Brunet has been disappointed by

the characteristic attitude of apathy and lack of courageous conviction on the part of the average French prisoner of war and, knowing that resistance will be more easily aroused and organized if the French soldiers are treated harshly Brunet is pleased when it becomes apparent that the train which many of the prisoners had thought was taking them home, is actually headed in the direction of Germany.

It is strange that Brunet should suddenly come into prominence as the key figure of the novel series since he has hitherto made only brief appearances, not being given the chance to reveal himself by his words and actions to the same extent as other characters. The reader knows of him only as a staunch Communist Party supporter and erst-while friend of Mathieu. So great is the change from what has gone before that it almost seems as if the second part of La Mort dans l'Ame should actually be the beginning of another novel, about Brunet, and which is concluded, as Antony Manser points out, (6) in the extract "Drôle d'Amitié" from the projected fourth volume.

For some time Brunet seems a near caricature of the blithely devoted follower of the Communist Party. His

whole life is bound up with his political affiliations to the extent that he exists not in himself but in the Party. His resolute adherence to its political values has enabled him to escape the anguish of moral choice. The contrast between him and Mathieu on this point is very marked. Mathieu, with his continual lucid self-questioning, is excessively subjective and too much concerned with himself. Brunet on the other hand is too convinced of the Party viewpoint to resort to doubt or questioning and thus the problem of moral choice does not arise for him. Freedom is Necessity, he believes, and desires no other definition.

Where other people are concerned he does not see them in a subjective relationship but only in terms of the Party and therefore in his dealings with them he is coldly impersonal, an attitude which inhibits his forming any genuine relationship with them.

A case in point concerns "le typo". The young man's name is Vernier but from the outset he is identified only as "le typo" since this is all the significance he has as far as Brunet is concerned. On their first meeting Brunet's thoughts are of the possible use the boy will be to his project.

"Typo: une chance sur trois; je lui parlerai demain....le typo; probablement un jeune camarade." (M.A. p.220)

Later, on the train Brunet finds himself next to "le typo" in the cramped space of the wagon load of men. Hearing him mention to Schneider that he is from Lyons, Brunet is embarrassed:

"J'avais oublié qu'il était de Lyon. Voilà deux mois que je le fait travailler et je ne sais rien de lui. A présent il est tout chaude contre moi, et il a le mal de pays." (M.A. p.283)

The youth, believing along with many others that he is going home, confides to Brunet that if it hadn't been for him he would have taken a chance on escaping long ago, but:

"Du moment qu'il y avait un responsable, il faillait bien que je reste." Brunet ne répond pas. Il pense: "Naturellement, c'est à cause de moi." Mais ça ne lui fait aucun plaisir. (M.A. p.283)

Brunet has realized that they are being taken to Germany and as they enter a tunnel tells him:

"Si tu veux te tirer, c'est le moment.... Tu n'as qu'à sauter quand on serait dans le tunnel.....Saute....Mais saute donc...." (M.A. p.284)

But the youth, thinking the train is going to Châlons does not. When it is apparent that the train is taking them to Germany "le typo" contemplates trying to escape by jumping from the train. Brunet, watching him, realizes his intentions and takes a tight hold on him, wondering if he has the right to stop him. He recognizes the suffering of the scared, desperate boy but cannot express his compassion because his emotional capacity is so limited since his frame of reference is not himself but always the Party. His thoughts at this moment show to what an extent his reactions as a person are determined by his C.P. convictions.

"Brunet se sent drôle; il tient dans ses mains cette dépouille; un membre du Parti qui ne peut plus servir. Il voudrait lui parler, l'exhorter, l'aider, il ne peut pas: ses mots sont au Parti, c'est le Parti qui leur a donné leur sens; à l'intérieur du Parti, Brunet peut aimer, peut persuader et consoler. Le typo est tombé hors de cet immense fuseau de lumière, Brunet n'a plus rien à lui dire. Pourtant il souffre encore, ce même. Crever pour crever...Ah! qu'il décide! Tant mieux pour lui s'il s'en tire; s'il y reste, sa mort servira." (M.A. p.296)

The boy tricks Brunet into releasing his grip and jumps. Instead of making for the embankment he panics and tries to climb back on the moving train. Terrified he calls Brunet's name and as Brunet reaches for him the

German guards shoot down "le typo" at the precise moment their hands touch. Although angered Brunet subdues his personal feelings to control the anger of the rest of the men with the help of Schneider.

"Brunet voit vingt paires d'yeux pleins de meurtre:...Brunet voit toute cette haine, sa haine, son outil et il a peur." (M.A. p.297)

The strength of their hatred frightens him even though he realizes that the success of his purpose depends on it. Brunet senses: "Ils n'oublieront plus. C'est gagné." (M.A. p.297)

In the turmoil of his thoughts and feelings, his physical discomfort accentuating his spiritual unease, Brunet seeks the reassurance of Schneider's presence. Rather pathetically, the human side of Brunet's nature is at last revealed in this closing scene of the novel. He no longer appears as the coldly impersonal Party puppet but as an ordinary human being who needs the warmth of communion with another human being.

"Il a mal, il respire mal.....Il appelle à voix basse: "Schneider! Schneider!"
- Je suis là, "dit Schneider. Une main prend sa main et la serre. "C'est toi, Schneider?"
- Oui." Ils se taisent, côte à côte, la main dans la main.....Brusquement Schneider retire sa main, Brunet veut la retenir mais Schneider se

dégage d'une secousse et se dilue dans le noir.
Brunet reste seule et raide, inconfortable,
dans une chaleur de four." (M.A. pp.297-298)

Despite their opposing attitudes and personalities there is a certain rapport between these two from the outset. To Brunet Schneider is an enigmatic figure. An intellectual, he appears to know a good deal about Communism and yet Brunet is unsure about him. He cannot categorise Schneider as he can the other men in the prison camp whom he takes the self-imposed responsibility of organising. Schneider takes a rather ironical attitude towards Brunet's zealous activity and, since he is less naive than Brunet, tries to undermine his faith in the Party - perhaps to prepare him for disillusionment. But in spite of their differences, maybe because of them, Schneider is the only person with whom Brunet has been able to establish the beginnings of any sort of genuine sympathetic relationship and it is this friendship which is to be developed further in "Drôle d'Amitié."

CHAPTER VI

LES CHEMINS DE LA LIBERTE

These three novels discussed in the preceding pages comprise the Chemins de la Liberté series as it stands. But before we go on to discuss the relevance of these three novels to the whole, uncompleted, project we should, in fairness, look at the published fragment of the intended fourth and final volume La Dernière Chance ⁽¹⁾ since "Drôle d'Amitié" as previously mentioned ⁽²⁾ provides the conclusion to the story of Brunet and Schneider taken up in the second part of La Mort dans l'Ame.

As Brunet's friendship with the disillusioned Schneider develops his unquestioning acceptance of the Communist Party credo is increasingly undermined. With the arrival in the camp of a senior comrade it is revealed that Schneider is in fact a distrusted ex-Party member, Vicarios, formerly a Communist journalist in North Africa who had denounced the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 and left the Party in protest. Not only is Brunet's friendship with Schneider endangered by this discovery but also everything he has striven to establish among the men in

the prison camp is rendered void when Schneider's predictions about political events are verified and the extent of Russian-German co-operation becomes apparent.

Brunet tries to adapt to the new Party-line but his confidence in its infallibility is destroyed. Full of doubts he now begins to see the Party from a more objective point of view.

"If the Party is right, I am more lonely than a madman. If the Party is wrong, all men are alone and the world is done for." (3)

His doubt combined with his strong affection for the discredited Vicarios prompt him to try and escape with him. Just as they reach the outside of the barbed wire the alarm is sounded and Brunet realizes that other Communists in the camp have betrayed them to the Germans. Vicarios is shot and dies in Brunet's arms.

"It's the Party that's killed me," Vicarios said, Brunet murmured: "let him not die." But he knew that Vicarios was dying..... No power of man could efface that absolute of suffering. It was the Party which had killed him. Even if the Soviet Union won, men were alone. Brunet leaned forward; he plunged his hand in Vicarios's dirty hair, and cried as if he might yet palliate the horror, as if two lost men could, at the last moment, conquer solitude. "To hell with the Party! You are my only friend." Vicarios did not hear..... (4)

Thus we leave Brunet intellectually and emotionally anguished. He has been forced to recognize the facts of human solitude and suffering from which his resolute activity in the Party had formerly shielded him. Not only is his strict allegiance to the ready-made values of the Communist Party gone, and the support this gave him dashed from under him, but his one valid personal relationship, which had developed at the expense of his faith and compensated for its loss, has been destroyed. The fragment ends with Brunet walking back towards the approaching camp guards, contemplating the anguish of the lifetime of despair which confronts him now that his belief in the Party has disintegrated and his only friend, Vicarios, is dead.

It is at this point then that we have the sum total of Les Chemins de la Liberté as Sartre left it. If we can assume from the title that his intention is to point out to his readers in what direction the road to freedom lies, then he does not appear to have succeeded. Rather, in investigating various possible roads taken by the characters in the novels, he has indicated to us those roads which do not lead to freedom.

To Daniel, in L'Age de Raison, freedom means doing the opposite to what one wishes. This negative approach to

freedom is surely valid for Daniel only because his is a particular kind of psychology and this definition expresses his extreme guilt and desire for humiliation and punishment. In Le Sursis he finds no lasting consolation in adopting a religious "salvation" from his problem, although his guilt is temporarily appeased by his awareness of being constantly observed and judged by an omniscient God. By the third volume of the cycle he has rejected this, finding a justification for not feeling guilty about being what he is when the Germans occupy Paris for symbolically Evil has triumphed over Good. Daniel sees routed those whom he hates for their "normalité" and no longer carries a burden of guilt when continuing his homosexual existence. But because his justification does not come from within himself (any more than he can accept his homosexuality from within himself), we may presume it will not be permanent and since we hear no more of Daniel or his relationship with the hapless Philippe, his problem is given no solution and his "freedom" has not been established by the author in the novel sequence.

Nor is the road to freedom to be found in the rootless freedom of Mathieu in L'Age de Raison, a carefully premeditated sort of "disponibilité", refusing to take

into account exterior factors and resulting only in the evasion of all responsibilities. The superficial "freedom" which Mathieu believes he has cultivated at this stage is merely an unproductive parody of real freedom, which, Sartre intimates, lies not in passive receptivity but in active commitment.

Mathieu in Le Sursis seems to arrive at the realisation that he cannot cultivate his personal freedom independently of external events, as the extremes of the historical situation point out for him a future of possibility in action. But when the situation returns to what it was before the crisis he resumes his former attitudes along with his way of life and when the likelihood of war becomes a reality, in La Mort dans l'Ame, his insight in this respect appears to have faded.

In his outburst of self-declaration in his suicidal defence against the oncoming German soldiers, Mathieu enjoys an illumination of another kind of freedom. With a vengeance he metaphorically destroys each of his past illusions as he fires shot after shot in the bitterness of self-reproach and in his release identifies Liberty with Terror. This is action, violent action, but because of

its totally iconoclastic and self-destroying nature it is impractical as a means of exerting one's personal freedom. Mathieu when last we see him has exchanged one false image of liberty for another.

Following this episode there remains only Brunet to lead us down the road to freedom. He is totally committed politically to the Communist Party, and this in itself is promising in the light of his author's leftist sympathies, but as has been mentioned already, ⁽⁵⁾ his unhesitating, unquestioning acceptance of its values as his own, has allowed him to escape, very easily, from the anguish of having to face a moral choice. He has not therefore, in Sartre's view, created his freedom. Nevertheless he does receive a very sympathetic treatment from his author, especially as a contrast to Mathieu in volume one where Mathieu himself envies Brunet his "freedom" of being at one with the Party and with himself.

It is in the third volume and the fragment of the fourth that Brunet becomes the central figure of the sequence and the question of whether or not his political conviction can constitute his freedom is elaborated.

Although his intentions in organising his prisoner-of-war comrades and keeping Party morale high in the face of adversity are commendable, his attitude is portrayed as impersonal and somewhat insensitive. The men he gathers together are seen, both by him and by the author, as a group rather than as individuals.

Only with the advent of his developing friendship with Schneider does Brunet display the first real signs of "human" warmth and emotion. His nature is mellowed by this rapport with another person and for the first time in any of his novels Sartre manages to convey the sense of affection, understanding, respect and companionship which combine to create an intimate and truly sympathetic relationship between two characters. All other "pairs" in his fiction - Roquentin/Anny, Mathieu/Marcelle, Mathieu/Ivich, Mathieu/Odette, Marcelle/Daniel, Boris/Lola, Odette/Jacques - have been sadly mis-matched in this respect, with no real communication possible between them. The one exception is perhaps the curious brother/sister combination of Boris and Ivich. Admittedly all of these are relationships between men and women so that comparison is perhaps unjustified, but they all serve to illustrate the theories expounded in L'Etre et le Néant that the

essence of relationships between conscious beings is based on conflict rather than on community and that mutual recognition of each other's freedom is impossible.

The third volume, then, concludes on a note of relative optimism despite the physical conditions of the story. It appears that the two directions in which Brunet is developing may be headed towards providing a satisfactory answer to some of the many questions raised in the novels. On the one hand, the introduction of the theme of a genuine mutual friendship between Schneider and Brunet is inspiring since it adds a new and favourable dimension to the latter. On the other hand his political conviction is still firm enough not to have been undermined too seriously by Schneider's ironical disillusionment.

But all hope is dashed in the two chapters of the fourth volume with Brunet's discovery of despair when his growing disillusionment is finalized by his betrayal by the Party to which he has devoted his life and when, deprived of the one personal relationship which ever mattered to him, he learns about the human situation of solitude. On his "road to freedom" Brunet has travelled from confident optimism to disillusionment in the political context, while the counterbalancing development of his sharing with another a mutual friendship and understanding,

increasing proportionally as his unquestioning acceptance of the Party diminishes, is tragically terminated by the death of Vicarios. There is no solution to his despair in sight as the novel sequence now stands.

Where then does the road to freedom lie? Evidently there can be no one way, for each individual must discover the way which is his own. But the various roads taken by the characters in the novels have been investigated and have proved to be dead-ends. Apparently none of these ways is, in Sartre's view, a right way. How then is the elusive goal of "freedom" to be attained? The question receives no answer in the analyses put forward in the novels although, as Cranston suggests, "perhaps the reader will have learned something, by a process of contradiction and elimination, about that direction in which Sartre does think the road to freedom lies." (6)

Nevertheless, the pattern which emerges from Les Chemins de la Liberté is predominantly a negative one. The characters are defeated by life and in their despair find no satisfactory way out of their dilemma. Having rejected the aesthetic solution proposed at the end of La Nausée, Sartre apparently set out to show in his next novels how

the existential consciousness could create a meaning for his life. But although Sartre, specifically in his non-fictional writings and here implicitly, advocates a solution which lies in authentic commitment and action, Les Chemins de la Liberté seems to reveal only the impossibility of meaningful action. Therefore the confident title of the series is unjustified and the "roads to freedom" have led to a tragic impasse, resulting in the abandonment of the cycle.

No doubt in undertaking this ambitious venture Sartre did not anticipate that this would happen. Thody (7) suggests that the reason for Sartre's abandonment of the series was largely a political one, that he probably intended to have the novel conclude with Mathieu freely committing himself to action within the collective discipline of a "truly democratic left-wing party", and with Brunet conquering his despair to join him, but that by 1949 such an ending was rendered impossible by Sartre's own experience of political disillusionment (bitterly expressed perhaps as Brunet's in "Drôle d'Amitié").

Simone de Beauvoir in La Force des Choses (8) gives an outline of what was to have occurred in the final volume:

"Starting, one from alienation in a cause, the other from an abstract freedom, Brunet and Mathieu both came to represent the authentic man of action as Sartre conceived him. Mathieu and Odette fell in love, she left Jacques, and they came to realize the fullness of a mutual passion. Arrested, Mathieu died under torture, heroic not by essence but because he had made himself into a hero...." (9)

She claims the main reason why Sartre discontinued work on the fourth novel was that the main points had already been made and that all that remained for him was to "pick the fruits he had so carefully ripened," but by that time he was more interested in the present than in the past.

Sartre himself has accounted for the incompleteness of the series by saying that he came to regard the subject of a novel depicting the Resistance as artistically unsuitable.

"The situation was too simple. I don't mean that it is simple to be courageous and risk one's life; what I mean is that the choice was too simple. One's allegiances were obvious....To write a novel whose hero dies in the Resistance, committed to the idea of liberty would be much too easy." (10)

However the matter is somewhat more complicated than Sartre allows. Firstly I think Thody has a valid argument in putting forward a political interpretation as part of the cause of Sartre's failure to complete the tetralogy. Secondly, while writing the novels Sartre seems to have become trapped into certain philosophical difficulties which he had not anticipated at the outset. Cranston develops this line of thought in his chapter "Sartre's Ethics" in which he points out that:

"There is a profound contradiction in Sartre's moral theory; and by 1949, when he was supposed to be finishing Les Chemins de la Liberté, he had reached a point where he had either to confront this contradiction, and resolve it, or abandon any work which would oblige him to make an unambiguous statement of his ethical position." (11)

The contradiction to which Cranston refers becomes apparent in terms of the human relationships depicted in the novels. The possibility of such a contradiction arising had also been indicated in 1946 in L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme where Sartre postulates that one cannot aim for one's own freedom without taking into equal consideration the freedom of others, (12) yet he has previously reached the conclusion that recognition of the other's freedom was beyond attainment. Certainly, Sartre later expressed his regret at the publication of this lecture.

I have drawn attention to the fact that the unsatisfactory relationships between the characters of the novels reflect the psychological conflict which Sartre, in L'Etre et le Néant holds to be the basis of all relationships. Yet when he breaks off the novel sequence it is at the culmination of a relationship based on true mutual friendship of the very kind excluded by the theories he developed in his major philosophical treatise. The Brunet/Schneider relationship is elaborated with a great deal of sympathy and is certainly one of the more edifying aspects of La Mort dans l'Ame. Furthermore, an absolute value is placed on it and recognized by Brunet in a moment of truth when he holds his dying friend Vicarios and in an "absolute of suffering" learns the meaning of despair as the relationship is severed.

Sartre does not succeed in extricating his characters from the pessimistic dilemma in which they find themselves when life has confounded them. In La Mort dans l'Ame we are led to believe that Mathieu dies a futile death thinking that Liberty is Terror. After such a powerful climax to his story it seems unlikely to the reader that Sartre should plan to reveal later that Mathieu was not killed after all and allow him to re-enter the story to assert his freedom

authentically. Brunet too, who assumes a role of promise after the disappearance of Mathieu from the story, is left disillusioned and in a situation of despair from which there is no hint of his escaping when Sartre ceases writing. It seems that he has allowed his characters to have run up against a brick wall of metaphysical pessimism and found their retreat closed off as well. He shares their predicament since he has been unable in his novels to justify the absurdity of human life and activities.

As well as being an indication of his political and philosophical despair, Sartre's failure to finish Les Chemins de la Liberté may also be attributed in part to his limitations as a writer. The unhappy fact is that he has sacrificed something of his talent as a novelist to his philosophical interests. As Iris Murdoch points out (13) he lacks the sympathy with the ordinary stuff of human life which characterizes the true novelist. Although there are instances where he successfully describes a moment in the life of ordinary people, especially in Le Sursis, such episodes are brief. His main characters are extreme cases representing the dilemmas of the intellectual, the Communist, the homosexual and so forth and although those problems are real they are specific and cannot be considered typical of everyday reality. Sartre shows very little

understanding of the kind of life which can and does exist beyond the world bounded by his philosophic beliefs.

If an author deliberately sets out to express certain philosophical ideas he has, it is inevitable that he should manipulate the characters to some extent in order to illustrate these points. Sartre criticised Mauriac for not allowing the characters in his novels their "freedom" to develop, yet he himself might be accused of failing to achieve the illusion of permitting his characters an apparently autonomous existence. The difficulty is to create a balance in writing a novel propounding certain philosophical concepts and at the same time producing convincingly "real" characters.

In his novels Sartre hoped to illustrate his beliefs and propose a solution for certain political and philosophical problems. But, having reached a stage where he had, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests, covered the main points and had only to gather the carefully ripened fruits of his labour, or else had found the intended optimistic ending impossible to implement for political or philosophical reasons, he apparently was not sufficiently interested in his characters to complete the story, one way or another.

He has set aside his novel at the point where the time was right for him to make a positive statement about his concept of liberty as the salvation of the existential consciousness. He has throughout given a masterfully powerful analysis of the negative side of his thought. When the novel breaks off his characters are shown to have been defeated by life and in this situation of despair Sartre has left them. The pessimism has not been countered with optimism since he has not been able to achieve in his novels the expression of a genuine transition from negative to positive.

This is why his novels seem far more pessimistic than other of his works. In his philosophical writings the transition from negative despair to positive assertion of "freedom" is more fully elaborated. From a literary view it appears that it is in the more constrained genre of the theatre than in the novel that Sartre has developed "existential heroes" who, although their situation is gloomy, seem at least to know the direction in which their salvation is to be found. But because in his novels he has depicted only the negative side of his existential doctrine and has not made the transition to a positive "road to freedom", it is understandable that a great deal

of criticism has been levelled at Sartre on the score that his existential philosophy has bred a literature of despair.

He is certainly acutely conscious of the tragic absurdity of the human condition but Sartre's so-called pessimism is neither discouraging nor cynical. On the contrary, his is a courageous and constructive belief in the value of the individual's freedom and in man's responsibility and capability of changing his own destiny. Despair may be the basic situation of the existentialist hero but having plumbed the darkest depths of absurdity and anxiety, having lost his illusions and found where his "freedom" lies he can then venture forth out of despair armed at least with a degree of confidence in himself.

In the novels Sartre relentlessly depicts the ugliness and degradation of the human condition, it is true, and at times his intense realism seems atrocious. His use of interior monologue allows a cruelly detailed knowledge of the characters in their most banal or disgusting aspects. Sartre's characters are deliberately anti-heroic and the banality of the characters and existence which he has chosen to illustrate is reproduced with pitiless accuracy.

The consciousnesses of the characters, particularly of Roquentin and Mathieu, are revealed in all their transparency. Whether or not this conforms to artistic requirements is not always Sartre's concern.

But the disgust and nausea which is the predominant mood of all the novels becomes a novelistic device self-consciously exploited to uphold the claim that it is only in the face of the boredom and ugliness of existence that existential man assumes his dignity. The disgust is a temporary ascesis, a highly disturbing experience which jolts the selfish complacency of the consciousness and forces a total revision of values.

In La Nausée Roquentin is acutely distressed at his disorientation in a world which has disintegrated into an unknown realm. In Les Chemins de la Liberté the constant self-analysis of the characters indicates their determination to escape futility and create a meaning in their lives.

Sartre's narratives depict his hero's⁴ quest to penetrate the depths of absurdity and despair in his anxious attempt to discover the way out of despair in his

"chemin de la liberté". To face up to the threatening abyss of nothingness demands much courage and Sartre's concept of heroics is sternly uncompromising. Neither he nor his characters seek an easy escape from their unasked for burden of responsibilities.

As regards the charge of morbidity, there can be no denying that Sartre's genius does have a strongly morbid element, but this morbidity has a certain potential to reveal truth and so is not without purpose. Certainly the picture of the world drawn in the novels is far from uplifting and many of the recurrent motifs - physical and metaphysical nausea, sadism, masochism, homosexuality, etc. - offer a depressing image of man. But such a picture is not contrived for the deliberate debasement and humiliation of man. Existential literature does not remain complacent towards the baser aspects of human nature. It does not advocate the passive acceptance of one's lower depths but a resolute assumption of one's duties to oneself and to others.

Anguished questioning is the lot of the Sartrian character, vainly trying to explain an irrational universe and realizing that his existence is absurd. Nevertheless

he must recognize his imposed exile and resist it, in so far as he is able, by committing himself to the attempt, at least, of giving a sense to things. However trapped he may be in the viscous superfluity of his existence he still seeks some justification for that existence.

Sartre is no idealist - he believes firmly in the reality of Evil. But despite the sordid squalor of the human condition as he sees it, he does not subside into passive nihilism. Such a view of humanity is not so entirely negative that no positive values can emerge from it, and Sartre believes that via the terrifying threat of Nothingness man comes to the affirmation of human freedom, as realized in committed action for the betterment of human society. The reader of the novels is not so much depressed by man's apparently inescapable gloomy fate as he is anguished by the demand to assert his free choice and responsibility in attempting a herculean task for which he will need all his courage since he alone must bear the burden, for he can conceive of no God to aid him.

Much of the bleakness of Sartre's existentialism must come from the fact that, not only does he no longer believe in traditional humanist concepts, but also that he

does not possess the comfort of a transcendental, religious belief either. Sartre's atheism is undeniably sombre. Accepting Nietzsche's claim that "God is dead" Sartre must then draw the, to him, inevitable conclusion that, in a universe abandoned by God, man is absurd and unjustified, as is Being itself.

William Barrett in his book Irrational Man, states that: "Sartre is the Cartesian doubter at a different place and time", ⁽¹⁴⁾ and likens his approach to Descartes' method of systematic doubt. But unlike Descartes, whose Catholic, Cristian belief and his concept of a structured system of essences preceding existence were to prove his salvation from the threat of Nothingness, Sartre, the atheist existentialist, must remain in the anguish of the void. Cartesian doubt reveals man's liberty as subject to God's liberty but if God is no longer acknowledged man's liberty becomes total and absolute, and proportionately more anguished. Thus man is accorded the position vacated by God. By his acts alone shall he create his own essence and by fully acknowledging his duties to himself and to others shall he achieve the difficult assumption of his total freedom. In the absence of God existentialism offers

an alternative which is stoical, but optimistic rather than apathetic or pessimistic.

Since for Sartre death is the end from which there is no resurrection, he is rejecting any sort of "hope" which Christianity might offer, just as he rejects other delusions, notably those of the traditional humanisms, by which man may be tempted to forget the responsibilities of his existence which he must assume. Sartre is writing specifically for the needs of his time as he sees them and believes that man may find within himself the courage to face the inevitability of death, despite having lost the comfort of religious belief. In his affirmation of the preciousness of the individual's freedom and the possibility of a free society which has shed the fetters of both bourgeois materialism and a too restrictive communism, Sartre offers to the generation which follows him a concept of social solidarity in which human life truly begins "on the other side of despair".

Admittedly his concept of freedom, as we have seen, brings its dilemmas and has apparently led him to an impasse which cannot be resolved without a substantial re-assessment of his committed stand. For Sartre however a "desperate hope" does not seem a contradiction in terms.

His fiction may be laden with intellectual anguish but his negation is not cynicism. Subsequent to the terrifying descent into the depths of despair the existentialists offer to reconstruct something of man's former dignity and nobility; they have the courage and determination to destroy in order to build again on firmer foundations. Human dignity and freedom are to be found "à l'autre côté du désespoir". It is regrettable that Les Chemins de la Liberté was abandoned before its characters had reached this "other side".

CONCLUSION

SARTRE: NOVELIST AND PHILOSOPHER

After a study of the close relationship between the themes of Sartre's existential philosophy and those of his fiction, the question arises as to the advisability of such a combination of novelist and philosopher. Existentialism although primarily a philosophic movement, has played a significant role in the literary history of this century by uniting contemporary philosophy with a literary expression, and among its ranks are to be found such reputable novelists as Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir. Although Sartre too, in terms of chronology at least, seems to have been instinctively drawn to the novelistic medium, he is an altogether more self-consciously "existential" novelist. His case is the more particular since he is virtually a professional philosopher who has used the novel form (and the dramatic form too for that matter) to give expression to his philosophic ideas.

In previous pages we have noted the general tendency of the novel this century to become increasingly pre-occupied with what might broadly be termed "metaphysics".

In 1947 Sartre wrote: "We are Jansenists because our age has made us thus, and since it has forced us to explore our own limits, I would say that we are all metaphysical writers." (1)

Philosophy and the art of the novelist would seem at first to be two separate entities, each with characteristics apparently contradictory to or incompatible with the other. Philosophic writings are analytical, attempting to give an account of life in general terms of ideas and abstractions. The realm of the novel on the other hand is one of action depicted within a particularized reality. Whereas a philosophic work is concerned with abstractions and generalities, the novel is traditionally concerned with individuals and their acts. Of course in so far as the novel does deal with individuals it is also concerned with human values in a more general sense and a certain maturity of moral outlook is to be expected of the competent novelist in his treatment of these values. By his selection and arrangement of his material in such a way that it must reflect his own "Weltanschauung", the novelist endows his fiction with a moral significance. In this limited sense then, the novel genre and philosophy do have a common point of contact.

However, the traditional mainstays of the novel are undeniably character and action (or plot). It is the novelist's task to "present" character and experience, not to analyse them intellectually. That is the philosopher's concern. The novelist may draw conclusions of course, he may even go so far as to pass judgement upon the characters he has created, but this is usually done implicitly, not explicitly. For if the intellectual structure of a novel is too obvious the work suffers in terms of art and is reduced to a mere "roman a these". A true novel must contain therefore, certain essentials which could not be replaced by a philosophical treatise. John Cruickshank observes in his introduction to The Novelist as Philosopher: "This distinction between the presentation of experience by the novelist and its analysis by the philosopher explains the widespread critical resistance, so often justified, to 'metaphysical' fiction." (2)

To the French reading public however, the concept of the metaphysical novel may not be so unnatural as it appears to the English (or American) mind. Henri Peyre in the Contemporary French Novel (3) notes that the term

'moraliste" (only inadequately translated by the English "moralist") is applied with pride to French novelists by their compatriots. They expect fiction to offer moral instruction and that literature should have a metaphysical justification is quite acceptable to them. Subsequently Peyre observes that in French literary history there are several examples of occasions when the prevailing philosophical mood has entered the fields of contemporary literature to the advantage of both, and cites Bergsonism, the Age of Enlightenment, and Cartesianism, as specific instances. Existentialism is likely to be acknowledged as equally influential on literary history and the novelist writing for a contemporary public has much to gain by broaching in his fiction the moral and metaphysical problems which beset the age, providing of course that he does not do so at the expense of artistry. If a novelist is to combine, as Sartre does, presentation of experience with obvious intellectual analysis, it must be achieved with careful balance if the result is not to cause the reader an uneasy sense of a hybrid genre.

There has been much critical speculation about Sartre as to which came first - the novelist or the philosopher, and indeed there is sufficient evidence to support either

opinion. Simone de Beauvoir notes that fiction holds a particular attraction for the existentialist since "only the novel allows a writer to evoke the original "jaillissement" of existence". (4) If this is the case it is not surprising that Sartre should have first become known as a novelist.

If we examine the dates of his writings we see that he appears to have been drawn first to fiction. We have his own testimony in Les Mots to the fact that even as a child Sartre had a passion for scribbling down his versions of stories he had read. In his adolescence he wrote a novel, Défaite, which was unpublished and subsequently destroyed, and L'Ange du Morbide was the title of an early short story. Of his better known works the short story collection, Le Mur (1937-1939), and his first published novel, La Nausée (1938), both appeared before L'Etre et le Néant, the major statement of his philosophy which was published in 1943. So in terms of the chronology of his writings Sartre seems to have been a literary artist before a philosophic writer. In the meantime of course he had received a formal training in philosophies, and Simone de Beauvoir testifies to his interest in the works of Heidegger in the late 30's. Also

he had written two relatively minor philosophical works, L'Imagination (1936) and L'Imaginaire (1940), which preceded L'Etre et le Néant but dealt only with limited aspects of his thought.

The first two volumes of the novel cycle Les Chemins de la Liberté, L'Age de Raison and Le Sursis, appeared in 1945 and the third volume, La Mort dans l'Ame was published in 1949. In the same year two chapters of the fourth and final volume, La Dernière Chance, appeared in Les Temps Modernes, but since that time Sartre has neglected fiction entirely in favour of drama, literary criticism, and further elaboration of his philosophical and political ideas in numerous articles. His novel sequence remains unfinished and it seems unlikely at this stage that Sartre will ever complete the final volume.

In view of his complete abandonment of the genre at the age of forty-four, having written only four novels, it is reasonable to suppose that Sartre first and foremost always was and always will be a philosopher. Since his novels are all, to a greater or lesser extent, incarnations of his philosophy, his claim to fame as a novelist lies in his talent for transferring his ideas to characters and images of a narrative form.

For Sartre creative writing is not a diversion from his philosophic writing - it is a different method of expounding the same theories. This approach to his role as a novelist is the basis of many of the objections which critics have raised with regard to Sartre's novels. Sartre could be accused of reporting experience out of a previous philosophical commitment and thereby jeopardizing the validity of the artist's testimony which should not be biased by intellectual preconceptions. And since his philosophy rejects the transcendental values which are expected in any truly artistic medium, his novels may appear too restricted. Sartre's theories of a "littérature engagée" indicate that what he demands of art is basically a means of analysis from which to derive moral recommendations. The novel form is particularly suitable for such an interpretation since it is a direct reflection of and a commentary upon the human condition. It is also a literary medium of expression with extensive influence and Sartre is fully aware of its potential in spreading his philosophy. However, care is needed to ensure that the novel does not become merely a vehicle for propaganda since to use prose in this way is to deny its creative function.

Some critics have claimed that Sartre's fictional works are merely illustrations of his philosophy, implying that he lacks a literary imagination, but Sartre's type of philosophy is not incompatible with literary expression. As an existentialist he is concerned with individuals in terms of their awareness of themselves and others. As a phenomenological thinker he attempts to grasp the reality of situations in their totality. This attempt to seize the particularity of existence in terms of contemporary reality is close to a literary approach which also deals with particular cases in particular circumstances. From Sartre's point of view there is no rigid division between the two activities of writing philosophy and writing existential novels. He has certainly fulfilled himself as a "littérateur" with his novels, plays, short stories, and literary essays, although he is also the most intellectualistic of the existentialists in his philosophy.

Simone de Beauvoir in her essay Littérature et Métaphysique suggests that a philosopher who is primarily concerned with subjectivity and temporality is almost sure to become a literary artist. But the idea always remains supreme for Sartre and his response is intellectual rather than artistic.

Nevertheless he has a considerable talent for handling the technicalities of novel-writing, particularly in his masterful use of language. The irrelevancies which can sometimes mar lengthy interior monologues have been reduced to a minimum and the dialogues have a naturalness and vigour which testifies to Sartre's skill as a dramatic writer. A certain horrid beauty is to be found in descriptions in La Nausée of physical objects - the pebble, the tramseat, the tree-root, - at the moment when Roquentin suddenly experiences the full realization of their existence, and in Les Chemins de la Liberté scenes like Mathieu's final outburst of self-declaration from the tower and the death of Vicarios are not without passionate intensity. But despite the eloquence of his prose, Sartre more often than not lacks the conviction of the true artist. His most successful passages have nothing of conventional beauty and it is this absence of the poet in the traditional sense which constitutes a major deficiency in Sartre as a creative writer. The nauseating superfluity of existence fascinates him and he describes perhaps too faithfully its horrors and absurdities. These are paradoxes in an artistic temperament which one naturally expects to have an optimistic confidence in life and humanity. Sartre rejects the transcendental, positive

values and any notion of a natural benevolence which sooner or later even the most melancholy poet seems to find. One cannot help feeling therefore that if Sartre were a true poet and artist his philosophy would have been considerably different.

With these observations in mind, plus the evidence of Sartre's abandonment of the novel genre, it is reasonable to assume that he is more of a philosopher than a novelist, and that the period of time, extending just over a decade, during which his novels were written was but one stage of several in his writing career. But it is an important stage and it is significant that his philosophy should have first been presented in imaginative form in La Nausée. It could be held that by writing this creative work of fiction Sartre obtained a grasp of reality which enabled him to clarify in his own mind the concepts of the philosophy he was later to formulate and develop intellectually in L'Etre et le Néant.

La Nausée is the most successful of Sartre's novels since it is the one where the creative writer and the intellectual philosopher are most closely united. This is perhaps the most purely "philosophical" of his novels, yet the concepts and ideas which play such a major role in the

novel are invested with a vitality and a sense of necessity which integrates them with Roquentin's experience. Sartre appears to have applied himself more assiduously to his task as a novelist and for this reason La Nausée has considerably more literary merit than his later novels.

After writing La Nausée, the imaginative manifesto, and L'Etre et le Néant, the intellectual manifesto of his Existentialism, Sartre seems to have been influenced more consciously by his philosophy in his subsequent fictional work.

Considering the promise of his first novel the three volumes of Les Chemins de la Liberté are somewhat disappointing. As individual novels and as a series, there is an unevenness in their quality. When he employs the technique of simultaneity, which granted has its advantages, there is sometimes an uncomfortable sense either of experimentation or else a display of purely technical virtuosity. Many of the passages of description and dialogue are little short of brilliant in their impact but the series as a whole does not reach the same level of merit as La Nausée. The integration and intensity of the latter is lacking although this is partly to be expected since a novel cycle deals with a far wider range of

characters and subjects. It seems that Sartre is now more self-consciously describing experiences based on the philosophic assumptions he has evolved and paying less attention to the finer points of the novelist's art.

There are instances in Les Chemins de la Liberté where the transmutation of ideas, necessary if philosophy is to be combined successfully with literature, is not always achieved. The intention of illustrating rather than expounding his philosophy in the series is not easy to accomplish and hence a certain inconsistency. To quote Iris Murdoch in her book Sartre: Romantic Rationalist:

"His inability to write a great novel is a tragic symptom of a situation which afflicts us all. We know that the real lesson to be taught is that the human person is precious and unique; but we seem unable to set it forth except in terms of ideology and abstraction." (6)

The main reason why the series is a comparative failure is its unrelieved pessimism. It reaches a state of thematic frustration, apparently because the philosophy of freedom around which it centres is defective. The problems of the will to action and the assumption of freedom by the individual finds no satisfactory solution and Sartre's abandonment of the series before its completion seems to indicate his inability to describe in fictional

terms the positive side of his philosophy which leads away from despair and pessimism. It would certainly have been Sartre's intention that the final volume, had it been written would have resolved these difficulties. That he will ever complete it now is unlikely, if not impossible, and Les Chemins de la Liberté will remain as an uneven testimony on Sartre's ability as a novelist, his philosophy, and his time.

A P P E N D I X

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- (5) i.e. "essai d'ontologie phénoménologique".
- (6) Beauvoir, Simone de; Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, pp.223
- (7) Les Ecrivains en Personne, Paris, Julliard, 1960, pp.205-33.
- (8) "Jean-Paul Sartre s'explique sur Les Mots", Le Monde, no. 5990, 18 April, 1964.

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- (4) Op. Cit. Avant Propos p.IX (1912 edition).
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